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Table of contents / Spis treści

INTRODUCTION.....	4
Chapter 1 REALITY THEORIES, NARRATIVES AND CYBERPUNK	10
Mimesis and Perspective	10
Science and narratives	13
Postmodernism and narratives	16
Possible worlds theory and narratives	28
Cyberpunk	33
Chapter 2 NEUROMANCER (1984).....	44
Chapter 3 A SCANNER DARKLY (2006) dir. Richard Linklater.....	68
Chapter 4 TRANSMETROPOLITAN (1997-2002)	89
Chapter 5 CYBERPUNK 2077	117
Chapter 6 THE JANUARY 6 SIEGE OF THE U.S CAPITOL	149
CONCLUSION	176
WORKS CITED.....	180

INTRODUCTION

Reality is a basic concept of existence which positions beings in a specific time-space environment. It has been approached by scholars from diverse disciplines. Both philosophers and scientists have constituted reality theories, hence the phenomenon appears to bear a complex, interdisciplinary structure. It incorporates axiomatic elements that function in a particular order.

Postmodernist thinkers aspired to compromise reality's coherency and deconstruct it. Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Francois Lyotard coined their concepts in the second half of the twentieth century when humanity entered the era of technological dominance. The critical approach to reality facilitated a meticulous examination of its constituents, further interlaced and obscured by the influence of technology. In postmodernism an order of reality was dissected.

Corresponding to reality, narratives order sequences of events to form worlds, mirroring reality's complexity. Narrative and reality share the commitment to cohesive structure. There has functioned an everlasting relationship between the two phenomena. Roland Barthes wrote that,

narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups, have their stories, and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds: narrative remains largely unconcerned with good or bad literature. Like life itself, it is there, international, transhistorical, transcultural. (1975: 237)

Through a narrative, reality is described with words, signs and images. Their ordering results in the formation of a set of rules. From narratives emerge worlds with unique sets of rules; thus they compel individuals involved with them to shift their perspective. Reality and the world are

analogous as they both maintain holistic systems which govern their environments. In cognitive narratology possible worlds theory has been adapted in order to examine affiliations of narratives with their structural elements, their readers, their characters, other narratives and what they display. From a diegetic perspective the world is perceived in a unique, unparalleled manner; however, shifting the perspective allows one to broaden the experience. It causes a blurring of diegetic and non-diegetic norms, thus stipulating readers to become conscious about the narrative order and its role within the narrative universe.

This dissertation is divided into a theoretical part, that is, the first chapter, and the analytical segment which consists of the following five chapters. It commences with assessing reality as an alignment of components which bear resemblance to a narrative system. Particular elements contribute a specific narrative value which is determined by the point of view from which they are perceived. An individual perspective is a constituent of a structure and it reveals it simultaneously. Notions from philosophy and sciences are applicable to literary theory and narratology, as they are meant to facilitate a world order. Theories composed by scholars unveil sets of rules which uphold the coherency of reality. Reality theories provide a framework for existence. They substantiate the cause and effect structure of an environment, reassuring that its incidental patterns are predictable to some extent. A narrative maintains a teleological construction as well. It generates a fictional reality, through which characters and readers maneuver, although not apprehending the narrative structures, which ideally become invisible. The postmodern theories of Jacques Lacan, Gilles Deleuze and Paul Ricoeur are employed in this dissertation to explore the perspective of an individual entity navigating between narratives and the narrative worlds.

There is an abundance of narratives that saturate historical and fictional discourses. Historian Hayden White refers to ancient philosophy in order to note the close relationship between the actual and the possible:

Something like this may have been what Aristotle had in mind when, instead of opposing history to poetry, he suggested their complementarity, joining both of them to philosophy in the human effort to represent, imagine and think the world in its totality, both actual and possible, both real and imagined, both known and only experienced. (White 2005: 147)

Historical discourse is a metanarrative that construes the actual reality. It can be composed with the use of literary techniques, therefore it might gain the properties of a literary genre. Each genre is classified and assessed due to the predominant features. It is possible to differentiate genres and combine them. The kinds of narratives overlap with each other resulting in the new ways of representation.

Jean Baudrillard argued the existence of “the characteristic hysteria of our times: that of the production and reproduction of the real” (1994: 17). He suggested that reality as an sociocultural environment is replaced by its subsequent version in a systematic process of simulacra formation. Its final product is an indistinguishable hyperreality. Engagement with a narrative is achieved in a parallel fashion. Furthermore, the processes of engagement vary, depending on the kind of medium, through which a narrative is constructed and approached. The contemporary media landscape conditions the experience of a specific reality in the context of its representation, that is, in the context of literary texts, films, comics and video games. Whether they are fictional or actual discourses is determined by the perspective from which they are assessed; hence a closer examination of the possible worlds and their structural elements is of essence.

A genre which has exceeded its original, literary form is cyberpunk. The list of cyberpunk texts includes short stories, novels, comics, films, TV series, tabletop RPG (role-playing) games and video games. Furthermore, its characteristics are found to be applicable in discussing the actual world of the 21st century: “Cyberpunk has continued to appeal to theorists

as it spread into the mainstream and beyond, particularly through its engagement with key contemporary questions such as the role of humanism, the emergence of the posthuman, and the importance of the animal” (McFarlane et al. 2020: 2). Diegetic elements of a cyberpunk world are to be observed in the actual reality, while dilemmas that emerge from its dystopian systems are of substance. The first chapter pinpoints cyberpunk as a genre, explicating its tropes, characteristics and inventory. Perspectives of various scholars are taken into consideration in reasoning why this particular genre fits the scope of the research regarding comparison of actual and fictional discourses and the worlds that they constitute.

The contemporary media landscape grants access to an abundance of media that are efficient in channeling a narrative world structure. The available media are interconnected, and share worldbuilding capacities and audience engagement techniques; thus they call for categorization. This dissertation concentrates on five particular kinds of media, which employ narratives to cause playful relocation into a possible world. A novel, a film, a comics series, a video game and an online journalist article utilize distinct storytelling practices, while participating in their exchange.

The initial analytical chapter concerns a literary medium. Literary texts have proven to be efficient in constructing worlds out of narratives. They are semantically composed to produce meaning, further engaging and immersing their readers in the process of imaginative discovery. One of the first novels to be considered cyberpunk is William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984). This chapter examines which engagement techniques does the novel operate in order to construct a world image for its reader. Then the storyworld of *Neuromancer* is analyzed. Its diegetic elements are compared and contrasted as a certain relationship with the contemporary actual world emerges.

The following chapter deals with an audiovisual medium: film. Unlike literature, film composes its world through deliberate positioning of sounds and images. A competent,

contemporary viewer arranges them upon the viewing in order to elucidate the narrative structure and project the world it is set in. The movie *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), directed by Richard Linklater, conveys a cyberpunk story, thematically set in close proximity to the actual world. The affinities between the two worlds are examined. The composition of the film's narrative elements exhibits a postmodern approach to reality. It defies the existence of a unanimously perceived environment, implementing a unique animation technique to develop its world.

Chapter four considers comics. This medium synthesizes literary properties with visual imagery. Comics engage the reader's senses collectively. They pair literary utterances with pictures of the world they are located in. The eventual environment perceived by the reader is a unified construct. The ensuing analysis concentrates on the cyberpunk comics series *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2002) created by Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson. Its plot illustrates cyberpunk and postcyberpunk characteristics. *Transmetropolitan* juxtaposes particular elements of its world with the objects and situations from the actual world. Its reader's engagement techniques function to adequately relocate the perspective to a captivating possible world.

The next chapter regards video games. It is a digital medium with interactive competences. Video games offer virtual worlds, with their own affordances. There are those which guide the player alongside a straight narrative path, and there are open virtual worlds, through which a player is asked to traverse without hindrance. Exploring them compels actions that are made possible by sets of rules. The video game *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020) invites its players to be immersed in a complex, cyberpunk digital environment, which bares resemblance to actual reality.

The final chapter of this dissertation focuses on the narrative considered to be a part of the actual world. The Pulitzer price winning online article, a coverage of the attack on the U.S

capitol that took place on January 6th, 2021, is a deliberate composition of elements constituting a narrative which induces a cognitive image of a world. It is a cyberpunk narrative, characterized by the properties of a fictional genre. Furthermore, as a medium online article applies specific reader's engagement techniques.

The ability to navigate between narrative possible worlds, projected through numerous media is imperative in the contemporary actual world, and delineating them should become a perpetual process.

Chapter 1

REALITY THEORIES, NARRATIVES AND CYBERPUNK

Mimesis and Perspective

The concept of mimesis has its origins in “the writings of Aristotle and Plato” (Doležel 1988: 475). Francis Fergusson describes Aristotle’s view on literature as follows: “He thinks it comes from two instincts in human nature itself, that of imitation and that of harmony and rhythm” (1968: 5). Aristotle assumed literary texts are constructed with structural elements which their creators mentally imitate from the actual world, to further arrange them in an original, cohesive composition. Fictional worlds evoked with literary techniques are mimetic, and their structural mimicry allows readers to comprehend them.

When a world is developed it retains a mimetic relationship to the actual world; however, it simultaneously becomes a separate construct with its unique set of rules. Mimesis positions the actual world as a predominant reality, thus introducing inevitable interpretative limitations. Lubomír Doležel suggests that “to transcend the restrictions of mimetic theory, we must search for a radically different semantics of fictionality” (1988: 480). In his article the Czech literary theorist advocates that possible worlds theory is compliant with literary studies: “Mimetic semantics is situated within a one-world model frame. A radical alternative to mimesis will be a fictional semantics defined within a multiple-world model frame” (Doležel 1988: 481). He continues that “the possible-worlds model frame offers a new foundation for fictional semantics by providing an interpretation of the concept of fictional world” (Doležel 1988: 482).

However, Aristotle’s notion of mimesis cannot be narrowed down to a mere mimicry. It is analyzed as follows by Antonio Jose Planells de la Maza:

mimesis is neither a copy of reality nor a relation of similarity that tends towards deceit, but rather a process of creation in which “it is not the function of the poet to relate what

has happened, but what may happen – what is possible according to the law of probability or necessity” (2000, p.56). This process, marked by artistic meaning, places human action as its main subject, and as its main objective: the configuration of a fable (mythos) or “structuring of events” (Ricoeur, 1980, p.57) that fulfills the principle of verisimilitude whenever possible. (2017: 35)

Mimetic worlds are therefore familiar, as they aspire to reflect the properties of the actual world. Arne Melberg adds that Paul Ricoeur “does not translate the Aristotelian constellation mimesis – praxis – mythos as ‘imitation’ or a ‘representation,’ but as ‘emplotment’ (la mise en intrigue): the creation of plot as the mythos of action” (1995: 45). Mimesis determines that the structural elements of narratives are initially and intentionally reconfigured to produce new meaning. As Ricoeur asserted, mimesis has a creational function. It situates fictional worlds in a distance to the actual world. The narrative element, which maintains functionality to assess the relationship between two or more worlds, is a focalized point of view, a perspective through which a given world is perceived.

An individual perspective is acquired through cooperation of mind and body, idea and matter. Together they constitute a cognitive mechanism. Through its workings the surrounding reality can be comprehended while an individual character operating it evolves in the process. Gilles Deleuze discloses dualism of idea and matter as

a more profound and secret dualism hidden in sensible and material bodies themselves. It is a subterranean dualism between that which receives the action of the Idea and that which eludes this action. It is not the distinction between Model and the copy, but rather between copies and simulacra. (1990: 2)

An individual perspective is indexical, selective and limited, which substantiates the formation of simulacra. Valeria Sonna comments that “given a concept such as the simulacrum we must

take it as a symptom. And the question we must ask is ‘what is it a symptom of’? Deleuze’s diagnosis is: it is a symptom of a will to select” (2018: 91). The selection is performed by the cognitive apparatus, operating from a certain perspective. Afterward there occurs a comparison of verisimilitude of certain elements against each other. In order to analyze reality the information about a particular perspective are of essence. Consequently, the image of a reality is filtered through consciousness connected to a perspective. Correspondingly, the reader enters a textual reality through consciousness of a being that is located in it, a focalizer. According to Burkhard Niederhoff “focalization, a term coined by Genette (1972), may be defined as a selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator, the characters or other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld” (2009: 115). A possible world emerging from the text is therefore altered by the focalizer’s and the reader’s experience and the condition of his/her mind. In order to examine the roles of consciousness and the unconscious poststructuralists departed from original Freudian notions:

Lacan saw the unconscious itself as structured like a language and endeavoured to move away from Freud and Simms shows us how he failed. Derrida, in his turn, needed Freudian thinking for deconstruction, because he was challenging the idea of normal, the possibilities of consciousness and the undermining of surface meaning. For Ricoeur, Freud is above all a cultural figure, seeking to interpret the layers of cultural meaning with which we surround ourselves. (Scott-Baumann 2009: 47)

The above-mentioned thinkers confronted traditional concepts to elucidate new perspectives. Their diverse approaches advocate that the psyche formulates images of reality for different reasons and that those images might be contested. For Friedrich Nietzsche “the meaning of life becomes a human’s choice, a narrative at each person’s disposal” (Scott-Baumann 2009: 47). Through the will to select and the specific capacities of perception and cognition a person constitutes a reality. It is facilitated by a narrative which prior to that has to

be chosen, decoded and comprehended. Paul Ricoeur, however, rejects the Nietzschean 'superman' and argues that "the only way forward, is to try and reduce the gap between subject and object, between the person and the world" (Scott-Baumann 2009: 47). There is a direct and reflexive connection between reality and how it is perceived. The connection has to be analyzed for the purpose of shortening the distance between the two phenomena. The higher proximity they reach the more fluently the connection may function. Karl Marx's critical theory established "a dialectical relationship between science and society" (Scott-Baumann 2009: 56). Marx scrutinized the dynamics of reality, its social and scientific dimensions in particular. The three masters of suspicion introduced notions that aid us in realizing that worlds might differ, depending from which angle they are perceived. Alison Scott-Baumann concludes that "Freud gave us a critique of culture focused on sex, Marx on money and Nietzsche on power: their impact on our culture is irreversible and only makes sense for Ricoeur if we take them together" (2009: 56). Paul Ricoeur underlined that the concepts applicable to the formation of reality are components of a larger structure. Only in unison do they produce a total world image, a simulacrum. The literary theorist Jacques Lacan claimed that a human being is a subject determined through language and by the surrounding social construct, although there is also the "ideal-I" (Lacan 2007: 76) trapped in the unconscious. For Lacan, the subject is dispersed, incomplete. The individual's perceivable reflection is constructed by language. A psyche in that case constitutes non-corporeal possible worlds, governed by specific rules, while the actual world is organized applying scientific theories.

Science and narratives

The scientific narrative is effective when it enables a given reality to function properly. Albert Einstein wrote that,

all that is necessary is the statement of a set of rules, since without such rules the acquisition of knowledge in the desired sense would be impossible. One may compare

these rules with the rules of a game in which, while the rules themselves are arbitrary, it is their rigidity alone which makes the game possible. However, the fixation will never be final. It will have validity only for a special field of application (i.e. there are no final categories in the sense of Kant). (1936: 351)

Scientific theories are modified and revised; thus a particular set of rules administers to a specific moment and place. It is a fragment of a distinct world, extracted with narrative techniques. The theories are transformed to become more intelligible. Their “evolution is going on in the direction of increasing simplicity of the logical basis” (Einstein 1936: 381). Scientists simplify sets of rules in order to bridge the gap between what is and how it is. Their ultimate purpose is to consolidate the existence with its structure. Diederik Aerts comments in the introduction to his essay on relativity theory that,

in a world imagined to be modeled by classical mechanics there is no problem concerning the question “what is reality?” Indeed, in this classical world, reality at a certain instant of time t is all that exists at this instant of time t . Expressed in ordinary language, reality is all that exists “at present.” It is accepted that the “past” does not exist anymore (it has been real in the past), while the “future” does not yet exist (it is a potentiality for possible realities to come). (1996: 1628)

Relativity theory influences the perception of reality. It implies that space and time are relative. Reality is therefore limited to the particular, experienced moment. Past and future are described as such in relation to the present reality. The relativity theory indicates timelines that also serve chronologically ordered narratives. Further, Aerts observes that “reality is what I would have been able to experience, if I would have decided differently in my past. The knowledge that I have about this reality is complex and depends on the changes that go on continuously in it” (1996: 1641). A particular moment, experienced from a set perspective, is saturated with pieces of information gathered from other narratives that might be defined as

such only from a distance. That way of comprehending the world complies with “a four-dimensional continuum” (Aerts 1996: 1641). It is comprised by three space dimensions and time. Reality structured in this fashion is reflected in a classic narrative form. In a timeline following a plot which commences at point A and resolves in point B, objects that existed in the recent past have a high level of verisimilitude; thus they are likely to exist in the present. Estimating the verisimilitude of a particular object is problematic when on a timeline it is situated further from the present moment, whether into the past or into the future. The physicist Carlo Rovelli states that, “if we look at the stone, it stays still. But if we could see its atoms, we would observe them constantly spread here and there, and in ceaseless vibration. Quantum mechanics reveals to us that the more we look at the detail of the world, the less constant it is” (2017: 113). The acquired information about a reality reflects the structure of an object and its atoms. The mental image of reality is in a constant process of refiguration. It revolves around what has been perceived and recollected. Pursuing a narrative order in its comprehensive extent is limited as well. Quantum mechanics indicates an alternative approach to the chronological timeline and three-dimensional space:

“You cannot simultaneously determine the position and momentum (i.e., velocity) of a particle with absolute certainty. Any increase in the determinacy of one of these quantities comes at the expense of the other.” Formulated by Werner Heisenberg in 1927, the uncertainty principle immediately became one of the rock foundations of quantum physics – the physics of the microcosm. (Maor 2009: 5)

The uncertainty principle entails the change of reality upon its observation from a singular perspective. It stimulates one to search for differently formulated narratives that deviate from the traditional, chronological composition.

The components of the physical realm, atoms, are in constant movement. Eli Maor notes that, “the quantum uncertainty principle applies to phenomena on the scale of atomic and

subatomic particles, so it is beyond the limit of our ordinary senses” (2009: 33). He claims that it might be possible to understand the uncertainty principle through music: “Here, then, is a challenge for the musicians among you: hear – yes, to hear – Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle” (2009: 33). The unseen and illegible side of reality, its vibrating elements must be translated through media to become comprehensible. Reality can be described through mathematic equations. Stewart Shapiro notes that, “it can hardly be denied that one must master a considerable amount of mathematics in order to comprehend the non-mathematical universe scientifically” (1983: 523). Equations construe a numeric order that conveys meaning. Language is a rigorously composed code as well. Scientific theories define the organization of reality, while narrative compositions accomplish that with the world they describe. Sonia Front points out that “science is a potent source from which to draw in search of new metaphors to conceptualize time and human temporality” (2015: X). She then focuses on the literary genre of quantum fiction, in which narratives might reflect the laws of quantum mechanics. Narratives evolve, words and signs collide with each other resulting in new meanings. In literary studies structuralists directed their attention to the language itself. For instance “Saussure’s writings promoted a ‘retreat into the code’” (Giddens 1987: 204). Ferdinand De Saussure opted for separating language from what it represents for the sake of its examination. However, “as critics have pointed out, if language is essentially a psychological reality, signs are no longer arbitrary” (Giddens 1987: 197). The signified and signifier are interchangeable, while through a reading process a code and what it stands for merge into a unified world image.

Postmodernism and narratives

Poststructuralists focused on deconstructing concepts that had been formulated before. Anthony Giddens observes that “Derrida’s writings are in some ways the most sophisticated outcome of the transition from structuralism to poststructuralism” (1987: 204). Derrida pointed out that “the goals of metaphysics cannot be simply re-examined or updated; they have to be

‘deconstructed’ rather than ‘reconstructed’ because they rest upon mistaken premises” (Giddens 1987: 204). Further, “this is because of a misapprehension about the nature of reality. There are no essences to be captured by appropriate linguistic formulations” (Giddens 1987: 204). Semiotically, the particular words, signs and phrases should be connected with the objects they represent. They illustrate what senses record and they resonate with the imagination which produces mental images. Furthermore, they are entangled in a complex web of meaning where each symbol refers to another. Through the referential aspect of language it is possible to form new word structures, phrases and narratives, which in consequence have the capacity to obscure meaning. Jacques Derrida aspired to escape from de Saussure’s vicious circle:

Derrida does not think that circularity or regress is inevitable here. Rather, treating it as a *reductio ad absurdum* (a reduction to absurdity) of any attempt to determine the conditions of possibility of the functioning of speech and writing on the basis of a radical system/event or code/message distinction, he concludes that such problems show the necessity of accounting for this functioning in terms which do not begin by splitting things up in this way. If we are to overcome the ‘chicken and egg’ oscillation, what is needed, therefore, is a way of ‘thinking at once both the rule and the event’.

(Glendinning 2011: 74-75)

Derrida indicates that the language and its representational counterpart are closely affiliated, while noticing that differences between objects are of an intrinsic nature. They are therefore open to multiple interpretations: “Derrida attempts to find elements of our thought that can be turned against the dominant picture, and thus help to depose ‘the privilege [that is] the ether of metaphysics’: ‘the privilege granted to presence’” (Glendinning 2011: 86). As a result of Derrida’s criticism, language is rediscovered as a conceptual mechanism.

The structure of reality echoes the complexity of a narrative with referential word compilations. Parallely an experience can be disclosed as an element of a narrative. Roland Barthes claimed that,

faced with an infinite number of narratives and the many standpoints from which they can be considered (historical, psychological, sociological, ethnological, aesthetic, etc.), the analyst is roughly in the same situation as Saussure, who was faced with desultory fragments of language, seeking to extract, from the apparent anarchy of messages, a classifying principle and a central vantage point for his descript. (1975: 238)

A scholar aspiring to analyze a reality built with narratives is confronted with their abundance. Concealed meanings are to be studied from the outside. That activity can be performed over the preexisting construct. Further, Barthes suggested rising above the mimetic aspect of the narrative:

Narrative does not make people see, it does not imitate; the passion that may consume us upon reading a novel is not that of a “vision” (in fact, strictly speaking, we “see” nothing). It is the passion to discover meaning, it is a striving towards a higher order of relation, which also carries its emotions, its hopes, its threats, its triumphs. What goes on in a narrative is, from the referential (real) point of view, strictly nothing. (1975: 271)

He implies that the importance of the mimetic function is misinterpreted. Readers engage in realities presented in texts to encounter fictional worlds and paradoxically they experience them as real, suspending disbelief. “A higher order of relation” (Barthes 1975: 271) delivers not only a hollow mental image, but it enriches it with other sensual experiences. A result is congested with so many levels of meaning that it becomes a possible world.

Such a world formed through an experience of a text is bereft of any physical evidence of its existence. Readers, however, might get involved with its diegetic elements, sometimes

even more than they do with actual news outlets, actual journalist reports, or even with the narratives of the lives of the closest friends and family. The complexity of interconnected narratives causes the meaning to be masked; however, it simultaneously invites a person to search for it.

Julia Kristeva concludes her essay on abjection as follows: “If there is an analytic jouissance, it is here in this totally poetic mimesis which traverses the architecture of the spoken word (*parole*) and goes from the conaesthetic image to logical and fantasmatic articulation” (1982: 148). Mimesis is a method to operate a narrative structure. A text discloses a world image when it is being interpreted by a reader. Jean-Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes noted “the magical function of the imaginary” (Lechte 2009: 88). Various texts share this function. Imagination evokes mental images of a possible world. Literary texts are formed specifically for that purpose. Furthermore, the reader reaches for imagination while reading an article describing an event outside of the present physical reach. A novel creates a channeled description of a storyworld, for instance by deliberately using a focalizer to guide or misguide the reader. A short news article from the actual world may use less complex methods of immersion, yet the reader’s imagination manages to fill in the gaps. While a possible reality remains non-corporeal the task of separating it from the actual reality is often supposed to be intuitive for the reader.

The digital media add the audiovisual techniques to the ways storyworlds are represented. Julia Kristeva expressed her fear of “the image as thing, as simulacrum” (Lechte 2009: 88). It might be based in the emergence of digital media and the death of metanarratives. Jean-Francois Lyotard defined the “postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it” (1984: 24). Societies relied on metanarratives, which are narrative constructs of the higher order; discourses which are believed to define what is true and significant:

For example, the rule of consensus between the sender and addressee of a statement with truth-value is deemed acceptable if it is cast in terms of a possible unanimity between rational minds: this is the Enlightenment narrative, in which the hero of knowledge works toward a good ethico-political end universal peace. As can be seen from this example, if a metanarrative implying a philosophy of history is used to legitimate knowledge, questions are raised concerning the validity of the institutions governing the social bond: these must be legitimated as well. Thus justice is consigned to the grand narrative in the same way as truth. (Lyotard 1984: 23-24)

The crisis of metanarratives came with the process of “delegitimation” (Lyotard 1984: 40) of institutions, such as universities. Further Lyotard adds that, “science plays its own game; it is incapable of legitimating the other language games. The game of prescription, for example, escapes it. But above all, it is incapable of legitimating itself, as speculation assumed it could” (1984: 40). The scientific discourse consists of a code, applicable to a description of reality. It is formulated at universities which have lost their authority, thus it is open for contestation. Lyotard came to the conclusion that there is no

universal metalanguage, the project of the system-subject is a failure, the goal of emancipation has nothing to do with science, we are all stuck in the positivism of this or that discipline of learning, the learned scholars have turned into scientists, the diminished tasks of research have become compartmentalized and no one can master them all. (1984: 41).

He criticized the superiority of science over other discourses. Instead, scholars from unrelated disciplines could exchange their concepts and turn up with inventive, interdisciplinary propositions. Lyotard emphasizes that language adheres to distant elements of a world, however it is a multilayered phenomenon: “The social bond is linguistic, but is not woven with a single thread” (Lyotard 1984: 40). In order to explicate that complexity he turns to Wittgenstein’s

ancient city metaphor, which displays language as a maze of buildings, that grow on top of each other. This notion corresponds with the concept of intertextuality:

There are always other words in a word, other texts in a text. The concept of intertextuality requires, therefore, that we understand texts not as self-contained systems but as differential and historical, as traces and tracings of otherness, since they are shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures. (Alfaro 1996: 268)

Intertextuality is the effect of a mimetic structuring of texts. It does not, however, eradicate the coherency of narratives. It exposes the mimetic connotations of texts, enriching the possibilities of their formation and hermeneutics. Lyotard further elaborates on Wittgenstein's metaphor from the postmodern perspective:

New languages are added to the old ones, forming suburbs of the old town: "the symbolism of chemistry and the notation of the infinitesimal calculus." Thirty-five years later we can add to the list: machine languages, the matrices of game theory, new systems of musical notation, systems of notation for nondenotative forms of logic (temporal logics, deontic logics, modal logics), the language of the genetic code, graphs of phonological structures, and so on. (1984: 40-41)

Employing the metaphor of Wittgenstein's continuously expanding city Lyotard confirms that reality might be envisioned as a complex network of narratives which persists to grow. Niels Brügger explicates that "the postmodern cannot be an epoch, since it has always been present in the modern in embryonic form" (2001: 81). Untrustworthiness towards metanarratives might have already been blooming in modernism. In response to the "delegitimation" (Lyotard 1984: 40) of the grand narratives and institutions which used to uphold them, Lyotard proposes another means of legitimation, that is 'paralogy'. The term refers to a consistent production of

meaning. Consensus is unreachable because there can only exist stages of the perpetual process. Lyotard stated that paralogy “would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown” (1984: 67), while it would be accomplished because “language’s reserve of possible utterances is inexhaustible” (1984: 67). Lyotard’s proposition is to “give the public free access to the memory and data banks” (1984: 67). In the actual world it has been achieved with the development of the digital media. Paralogy is a polyphony of perspectives in a narrative, while intertextuality conceptualizes the intricacy of a narrative network. Both phenomena might be overwhelming for a singular being and thus they might induce the fear of simulacra.

Jean Baudrillard assumed the fear of simulacra might have already come true in the form of hyperreality. He described this phenomenon applying Jorge Luis Borges’ allegory of the perfect map which has successfully replaced the original:

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory - precession of simulacra - that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. The desert of the real itself. (Baudrillard 1994: 3)

The term ‘hyperreality’ concerns a reality which has become an absolute version of its own representation. Therefore it has lost its initial point of reference. It is thus an independent construct based on “models of a real without origin or reality” (Baudrillard 1994: 3). It was formed in the process of ideal reading, resulting in an image of reality whose simulative structure is invisible. The paradox of Baudrillard’s philosophy is that he himself is capable of

noticing the perfect layers of a simulacrum which are supposed to conceal each other totally. In a narratological context this paradox finds its use. Entering a hyperreality means reaching a complete immersion, which can be broken upon readers' wish. The concept of hyperreality acknowledges images as constituents of reality:

Whereas representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum. Such would be the successive phases of the image: it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the absence of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum. (Baudrillard 1994: 6)

The simulacrum forming process is applicable to the narratological concept of the creation and reception of fictional worlds. When the reader interprets a text, it is imaginatively visualized as a world, and when the viewer watches a film actors are perceived as the characters they play. The representation replaces the original. Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality proves to be useful in assessing the shift of perspective occurring when engaging with narrative constructs.

Hyperreality consists of an environment constructed out of what Baudrillard called "models of control" (1994: 3). An example of this is the structure and function of the hypermarket. According to Baudrillard the hypermarket is one of

the poles of simulation around which is elaborated, in contrast to old train stations, factories, or traditional transportation networks, something other than a "modernity": a hyperreality, a simultaneity of all the functions, without a past, without a future, an operability on every level. (1994: 54)

By design it obscures the imperfections. If an illusion is somehow breached it is restored in an instant. A hyperreal pole "concentrates and rationalizes time, trajectories, practices - creating

an immense to-and-fro movement totally similar to that of suburban commuters, absorbed and ejected at fixed times by their work place” (Baudrillard 1994: 52). A surrounding environment is fixed, prepared. Hyperreality becomes the actual reality because it is designed for that purpose. Then it offers a new point of reference. The formation of hyperreal worlds is facilitated by the properties of the digital media which are capable of creating audiovisual, interactive constructs. Baudrillard observes that,

the media are producers not of socialization, but of exactly the opposite, of the implosion of the social in the masses. And this is only the macroscopic extension of the implosion of meaning at the microscopic level of the sign. This implosion should be analyzed according to McLuhan’s formula, the medium is the message, the consequences of which have yet to be exhausted. (1994: 56)

Contemporary media transport social structures into virtual environments, producing interactive, narrative networks. Informational media, news TV channels and news websites, disseminate actual information about the actual reality. In the online environment social media gather real people who all contribute real information. The outcome of overlapping boundaries between real and virtual is what Baudrillard named “the implosion of the medium itself in the real, the implosion of the medium and of the real in a sort of hyperreal nebula, in which even the definition and distinct action of the medium can no longer be determined” (1994: 57). Discussing Baudrillard’s concepts Mark Nunes observes that “the Internet does more than network the globe: it creates a metaphorical world in which we conduct our lives. And the more ecstatic the promises of new possible worlds, the more problematic the concept of ‘the world’ becomes” (1995: 314). Hyperreality is an elusive phenomenon, as it cannot be compromised. A single reality is always actual from a specific perspective, despite its hyperreal nature. The internet, a digital medium, exposes the relative nature of the actual world, as it maintains a virtual space in which real people exist. Nunes concludes that

Internet, rather than presenting the simulation of totality, might provide a space of play. Rather than pursuing ends through this technology, one might instead turn oneself over to the drift and derive of “cyberspace”. Baudrillard’s fatal vision shimmers on the surface of our computer screens. His vision, however, also challenges us to find a depth to the screen, to find or rather, lose ourselves on a different heading, off our familiar paths. (1995: 326)

The fear of simulacra looms ominously yet it does not foreshadow the annihilation of reality. Actual reality is impossible to destroy although its narrative framework might be conceived. Narrative structures of realities sometimes assume abstract, impossible forms which are further transformed by digital media.

Jean-Marie Scheaffer, French philosopher and literary theorist, asserts that, “poststructuralist philosophers, anthropologists and literary critics have questioned the validity of the fact/fiction distinction as such, sometimes contending, in a Nietzschean vein, that fact itself is a mode of fiction (a fiction in the sense of a ‘making up’)” (2009: 98) He states further that, “in real-life situations, the distinction between factual and fictional narrative seems to be unavoidable, since mistaking a fictional narrative for a factual one (or vice versa) can have dramatic consequences” (Scheaffer 2009: 98). Scheaffer notices the dire consequences of confusing one reality with another. The distinction is inescapable and required of a person who is about to engage with a text. It is a knowledge parallel with skills of a ship navigator who knows from which port the ship has departed. Navigating narratives is fundamental as the further a possible world is situated from the actual world the more difficult it is to validate its properties. Scheaffer mentions the possible worlds theory as a valuable solution to this problem:

In terms of possible worlds theories, a fictional world is a counterfactual world, but this counterfactual world is as individual as the world we live in: the counterfactual world is not of a superior kind to our actual world (whereas in Aristotle mimetic reference attains

a higher order of truth than factual reference), but simply an alternative world. In fact, the real world is also a possible world. According to modal fictionalism, it differs from other possible worlds because it is the only one which is also actual, whereas according to the modal realism defended by Lewis, it differs from other possible worlds (which are as real as “our” world) only by the contingent fact that we happen to live in it. Possible worlds theories of fiction therefore do not claim that fictional truth is more general than factual truth: it is simply true in another world or universe. (2009: 104)

The possible worlds theory does not place one reality above others. It transmits this obligation to a point of view. Following Marie-Laure Ryan, Scheaffer observes that, “narrative immersion is not limited to fiction” (2009: 112). Non-fictional texts invite their readers to project a mental image of a world as well. Furthermore, immersion in a historical narrative is achieved fluently because its truth value is presupposed. It concerns the actual world. Simultaneously it can be approached as a possible world destitute of any present, physical value. Hayden White, postmodernist and American historian, starts his text on historical fiction as follows:

In a well-known essay on history and fiction, Michel de Certeau maintained that “fiction is the repressed other of historical discourse.” Why? Because historical discourse wages everything on the true, while fictional discourse is interested in the real which it approaches by way of an effort to fill out the domain of the possible or imaginable. (2005: 147)

White discerns fiction’s ability to uncover meanings impossible to be found in a traditional historical discourse. He continues that “de Certeau goes on to assert that the return of the repressed other (fiction) in history creates the simulacrum (the novel) that the history refuses to be. However, in refusing the real (which can only be symbolized, never represented), history refuses the possible” (White 2005: 147). A historical text structured as a literary text manages to create a simulacrum, an immersive possible world. Adversely, a traditional historical

discourse lacks this insight: Aristotelian higher truth, provided by a coherent narrative. According to Hayden White “the reality of the past is a given, it is an enabling presupposition of historical enquiry. That events actually occurred in an ‘olden time’ cannot be doubted, since there is plenty of factual evidence attesting to their occurrence” (2005: 148). The indisputable presence of physical evidence somewhere in the space-time continuum serves as the foundation of the actual world’s ontology and its historical dimension. Historical truths are axioms, the premises for commentary and criticism. Moreover, they function in a context of a narrative, which assigns them a place in a chronological chain of events.

Regarding the application of mimesis in historical fiction White turns to Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*: “Her London, or rather the part of it which Woolf’s heroine symbolizes, is fully recognizable as a realistic image of what London ‘must have been like’ in or around 1920” (2005: 148). It is an example of a fictional narrative, immersive enough to form a simulacrum that can carry a historical value. White states that, “the conjuring up of the past requires art as well as information” (2005: 149). According to him “the mixing of the types and the inversion of generic hierarchies were the order of the day for the modernists, and in postmodernist historical novelists this mixing of types goes without saying as a basis for an art worthy of serving the political needs of our time” (White 2005: 154). Intentional alignment of textual elements precipitates the creation of both literary fiction and historical fiction. Mimesis remains a mechanism, and when their formation is finalized, both texts present possible worlds. That effect allows historical fiction to be more accessible for an average reader than unanchored historical statements. Hayden White’s take on historical discourse suggests that history told in a literary mode can immerse its readers. In that fashion it legitimizes texts about the actual world as narrative constructs capable of producing an immersive possible reality, an accessible simulacrum.

Possible worlds theory and narratives

In the actual world the contemporary receiver is influenced by a variety of media which present possible worlds. Possible worlds theory is applied to explicate the concept of hyperreality when it comes to the formation of a world or a reality. They are created in a mimetic process, through which one world replaces the previous one, resulting in a paradox, a temporary simulacrum.

Alice Bell and Marie-Laure Ryan, narratologists, find useful definitions of the possible worlds theory in the works of logicians Jaakko Hintikka and David Lewis. The former thought of “language as calculus” (Ryan and Bell 2019: 2). Hintikka suggested “that language is freely re-interpretable like a calculus” (2010: 54). Poststructuralist Frederic Jameson places an individual in a “prison-house of language” (Jameson 1975). Language structures describing the actual reality are invisible, although a reader is able to enter other worlds through make-believe:

In a many-worlds ontology, fictional texts can be associated with worlds, these worlds can be imagined on the basis of all the propositions presented as true by the text, and it is possible to distinguish true statements about the members of particular fictional worlds, such as “Emma Bovary was a dissatisfied country doctor’s wife,” from false ones, such as “Emma Bovary was a paragon of marital fidelity.” (Ryan and Bell, 2019: 3)

The possible world of a literary text is the actual one for its protagonist. Following the example above, for Emma Bovary the actual reality is placed in provincial Northern France, which is a particular space specific to a distinct time in that reality. It is separate from the actual provincial Northern France viewed by a person who currently resides there, and they are both separate from the provincial Northern France viewed by a person who inhabited it in another period of time. Ryan and Bell explain that “if pws are indeed complete, this means that their totality is beyond the grasp of the human mind. But the same can be said of our experience of the actual

world” (2019: 7). Human beings are incompetent to discover every piece of information about the actual world, and in a similar manner a text provides only a fragmented insight into a possible world. There is something that exists beyond the perception of an individual for whom “actual” is indexical, like ‘I’ or ‘here,’ or ‘now’: it depends for its reference on the circumstances of utterance, to wit the world where the utterance is located” (Lewis 1979: 184). Further, in David Lewis’ modal realism “there is no ontological distinction between the actual world and merely possible ones: both kinds are made of the same substance, that is, of material things and events” (Ryan and Bell 2019: 7). Moreover, Lewis’ ideas explain how a reader situated in the actual reality can experience a narrative set in a possible world: “If we couple Lewis’s conception of fiction as discourse that denies its own status as fiction with his indexical conception of actuality, we can describe the experience of fiction as a playful relocation of the user to the pw where the story is told as true” (Ryan and Bell 2019: 16). In this fashion the user of fiction is “recentered into fictional worlds” (Ryan and Bell 2019: 16). For the time spent within a possible world presented through a specific medium an individual’s attention is shifted from the actual reality to the currently experienced one. The physical body remains in the actual reality but the focus of the mind is relocated through make-believe into a fictional reality which in consequence becomes actual. Another logician, Saul Kripke opposed Lewis’s modal realism, recommending that ‘possible world’ should rather be called “possible state (or history) of the world’, or ‘counterfactual situation” (1972 :15). His perspective is far more pragmatic regarding ontology and the actual point of view.

On the other hand Lewis’ theory has been applicable in narratology. Marie-Laure Ryan pointed out how possible worlds are interpreted with the use of mimesis:

We construe fictional worlds as conforming as far as possible to our representation of aw [actual world]. In other words, we do not make gratuitous changes: if a text speaks of a winged horse, we imagine an entity presenting all the properties of actual horses

but being able to fly. Yet we do not imagine this horse as breathing fire unless specified by the text. When the text clashes with our experience of reality, the text has the last word. (Ryan and Bell 2019: 16-17).

To utilize Ryan's terminology, imagining something possible as similar to its counterpart from the actual world is governed by "the principal of minimal departure" (Ryan and Bell 2019: 16). Mimesis cannot be omitted. One of its functions is to enable relocation of focus into a possible world. Ideally a simulacrum is the final stage of a mimetic relocation process.

Possible worlds theory is "indifferent to the distinction between fiction and nonfiction" (Ryan and Bell 2019: 18). Following that assumption characters in possible worlds are able to form their own possible worlds while all of them are encompassed in a larger structure, a storyworld: "In Ryan's model, plot, or narrative action, consists of the movement of worlds within narrative universes" (Ryan and Bell 2019: 20). The possible worlds formed in the minds of characters are constantly updated in context of the events in their actual world. Therefore, after being playfully relocated into another world an individual acquires the perspective of another individual inhabiting that world.

Ryan and Bell claim that, "history, after all, should not be fiction, despite the blurring of the borderline caused by the consideration of imaginary situations" (2019: 23). Acknowledging a stable historical background is necessary for an individual in order to uphold the concept of stable time-space continuum governing the actual reality. The realness of the historical discourse is presupposed even though it can be fragmented and incoherent. Fictional narratives might be presented in a more exhaustive manner than distant historical narratives. In accordance with science fiction narratives inspired by the so-called many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics, one may reason as follows:

when an observer opens the box where Schrödinger's cat was subjected to a nuclear reaction that puts the poor feline in a superposition of states, this observer does not cause the cat to be either dead or alive; rather, the nuclear reaction leads to a splitting of worlds that instantiate all the possibilities predicted by Schrödinger's equation. In one of these worlds the cat is dead, in another he is alive, and the observer discovers the cat to be either dead or alive depending on what world he belongs to. (Ryan and Bell 2019: 24)

Observing that Schrödinger's cat is alive equals with the claim that it is the actual cat. The dead cat then has to remain in a possible world. When it comes to fictional worlds, through acknowledging the fictional status of characters in a possible world, an actual individual possesses the power to analyze and interpret them and their environments. Placing a non-fictional or actual text in the ontological position of a fictional one for the time of the reading may result in a chance to experience it more intricately, and then apply the gathered knowledge to the actual world: "counterfactual history typically focuses on strategic moments when the future of the world seems to be at stake, as opposed to routine events that could go one way or the other without important consequences" (Ryan and Bell 2019: 22). Counterfactual history provides a chance to imagine different outcomes of a historical narrative. It therefore holds educational properties.

Fictional and actual representations of texts employ the same formation techniques in the era of contemporary digital media. Ryan and Bell establish that, "digital media have made worlds accessible to their readers/players/users, if not corporeally, at least as active participants" (2019: 27). Video games, a digital medium, allow its players to interact with a possible world visible on the screen. Alice Bell has examined another digital medium, Internet, analyzing hypertexts: "hypertext fictions consist of individual windows of text, each known as 'lexia', which are connected by hyperlinks. Structurally, they are often multi-linear so that a number of different possible routes exist within the same work" (2010: 1-2). Hypertexts show how a

fictional, digital text manages to engage users in the process of worldmaking. They get access to it through the Internet, which has become a platform suitable for creating interactive possible worlds. Bell writes that, “the reader’s role outside the text draws attention to the artificiality of the narrative because they are always aware that they are involved in the construction of the text” (2010: 17). This quote proves that despite the fact that mimesis functions as a mechanism to construct a world it can also break immersion and undermine its foundations.

Recentring functions differently when experiencing possible worlds presented in literary texts, films, video games and comics. Besides that, the narratives created with those media are ascribed to a specific genre of fiction. Cyberpunk worlds are analyzed in the course of this dissertation because it is a genre with a wide representation in multiple media. Moreover, cyberpunk is worth studying in the context of Marie-Laure Ryan’s “nine types of accessibility against which a fictional world can be assessed” (Ryan and Bell 2019: 21). Accessibility relations is a category that describes in what aspects does a possible world resemble the actual world. Cyberpunk contains certain diegetic elements that are to be observed in the contemporary actual world. A possible world with the properties of science fiction genre, of which cyberpunk is a subgenre, is supposed to differ from the actual world if to consider two types of accessibility relations: “Identity of inventory (B/same inventory): TAW [textual actual world] is accessible from AW [actual world] if TAW and AW are furnished by the same objects” (Ryan 1991: 558), and

Chronological compatibility (D/chronology): TAW is accessible from AW if it takes no temporal relocation for a member of AW to contemplate the entire history of TAW. (This condition means that TAW is not older than AW, i.e., its present is not posterior in absolute time to AW’s present. We can contemplate facts of the past from the viewpoint of the present, but since the future holds projections rather than facts, it takes a relocation

beyond the time of their occurrence to regard as facts those events located in the future.
(Ryan 1991: 559)

Cyberpunk is a genre which has introduced many technological inventions that are now available to a regular user of the actual world. Therefore today's actual world becomes more and more cyberpunk both inventory-wise and time-wise (e.g. *Blade Runner* film from 1982, which is set in the year 2019). Ryan also notes that, "intra-universe relations make it possible for the members of the TAW to travel mentally within their own system of reality" (1991: 558). In cyberpunk narratives characters struggle with an unstable reality; hence insight into how they project its order is common and presented through the use of different storytelling techniques.

Cyberpunk

Cyberpunk as a literary genre was established in the 1980s. It has emerged as a subgenre of science fiction, which by then had thematically departed far from Earth. In opposition, cyberpunk offered a return to the grounded aspects of technological development. It is a genre characterized by the violent fusion which results from the collision of the extremes: body and technology, physicality and spirit, filth and purity, punk and cyber. Marie-Laure Ryan states that,

in science fiction proper, the focus is on the changes brought about by technological advances. Since technology must respect mathematical and natural laws, relations E/natural laws, F/taxonomic, G/logical, H/analytical, and I/linguistic will be maintained, but all others may be severed. The TAW will then contain the same classes of objects as the AW, but not the same individuals. (1991: 563)

Through Ryan's accessibility relations between the actual and the possible world it can be noticed that worlds labeled as science fiction can become comparable to the actual one. In the actual world technological advancement exceeded the expectations of many science fiction

writers. Access to the infinite well of unverifiable information, the Internet, electric cars, virtual reality and artificial intelligence are only a few inventions that might have been formulated in the mind of a science fiction writer.

Science fiction creators perceived the technology reshaping their world in the 1980s; thus in a mimetic fashion they formed cyberpunk possible worlds which solidified the genre's characteristics. Graham J. Murphy and Sherryl Vint report that, "scholars and fans acknowledge its birth in the fictions of, chiefly, William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, only to carbon-date cyberpunk's origins in such predecessors as J. G. Ballard, James Tiptree, Jr., Joanna Russ, John Brunner, Vernor Vinge, or Philip K. Dick" (2010: 8). William Gibson wrote *Neuromancer* (1984), one of the first cyberpunk novels. It is a narrative that introduced numerous tropes of the genre. While trying to operate within the context of the collision of extremes cyberpunk creators were bound to invent the functional characteristics of a brutal environment. Rob Latham in his review of *Fiction 2000* (a collection of essays on fiction created at the end of the twentieth century) wrote about *Neuromancer* that, "if the essays in this book do nothing else, they certainly establish the novel's formal and thematic complexity, its openness to diverse and often conflicting modes of interpretation, and its sheer power to capture the critical imagination" (1993: 266). Cyberpunk found its readers because it dealt with issues perplexing them in their actual world at the time. Claire Sponsler states that, "like Thomas Pynchon, a writer he cites as a formative influence, Gibson is notable for taking seriously recent developments in technology, culture, and socioeconomic organization, attempting in his stories to convey what he sees as their inevitable consequences" (1992: 626). William Gibson mimetically constructed the possible world of *Neuromancer*. He presented technological dominance as a regular element of human existence, simultaneously introducing types of characters that are able to function in such an environment. A world hostile to humans in a natural sense requires a set of strong characters who will not be overwhelmed by unwelcome

conditions. Thus at first, to be cyberpunk was equal to being a rebel. Cyberpunk stands for a collision and “its protagonists are antiheroes set adrift in a world in which there is no meaning, no security, no affection, and no communal bonds—except for those they themselves tenuously create” (Sponsler 1992: 627). Furthermore,

antifoundational, skeptical of authority, suspicious about the possibility of human autonomy, and fascinated by the way technology and material objects shape consciousness and motivate behavior, cyberpunk would seem to square with postmodern culture as it has been amply described by Baudrillard, Jameson, and Jean-Francois Lyotard, among others. (Sponsler 1992: 627)

Fear of the unknown, of the technological advancement in the actual world of the 1980s, established cyberpunk creators’ application of mimesis. It resulted in a theme of rebellion against technological oppression and against large corporations that make it possible. Moreover, cyberpunk describes worlds in which Baudrillard’s hyperreality, Jameson’s prison-house of language and Lyotard’s paralogy all acquire shape. Brian McHale claims that, “the novelty of cyberpunk, in other words, lies not in the absolute newness of any particular component or components, but in a shift of dominance or center of gravity reflected in the combination of components and their relative conspicuousness in cyberpunk texts” (2010: 20). Cyberpunk centers around the collision of extremes and its immediate effects. It takes the familiar science fiction tropes and deconstructs them by bringing them down:

Where space-stations and space colonies of traditional SF are glamorous showcases of high technology (think of Kubrick’s *2001*), those of cyberpunk SF are likely to be orbiting slums—shabby, neglected, unsuccessful, technologically outdated, as in Gibson and Sterling’s “Red Star, Winter Orbit,” Shiner’s *Frontera* (1984), or Shirley’s *Eclipse* (1985). (McHale 2010: 23)

Cyberpunk offers possible worlds which “appear as islands” (McHale 2010: 24), while also presenting “different ontological planes—worlds and meta-worlds, or worlds and inset worlds (worlds-within-worlds)” (McHale 2010: 26). The contemporary actual world as well might be perceived applying that terminology. Possible worlds developed by different cultures remain beyond the instant physical access, yet they are reachable through an inset world, a virtual space open for everyone, the Internet.

Cyberpunk is rooted in the works of postmodern writers: “cyberpunk authors have acknowledged the influence of works by William Burroughs, J. G. Ballard, and Phillip K. Dick” (Moylan 2010: 116). Philip K. Dick’s texts were marked by uncertainty towards technology and a stable reality. Many of them have been adapted into movies. The textual originals have been remade in order to produce new possible worlds. One of the most prominent examples of Dick’s works’ adaptations as well as cyberpunk films is *Blade Runner* (1982). Christophe Den Tandt uses it to underline the naturalistic side of cyberpunk:

Ridley Scott’s film *Blade Runner* (1982), based on Philip K. Dick’s novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), depicts a world Emile Zola, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, John Dos Passos, and Raymond Chandler might have claimed as their own. The film opens with a panoramic view of an industrial megalopolis identified in screen captions as 2019 Los Angeles. Viewers discover a tangle of urban canyons, fire-spouting oil refineries, and huge pyramid-shaped high-rises. (2013: 93)

Blade Runner (1982) is mentioned “in an anecdote familiar to sf fans, William Gibson—who would become the major novelist of the budding movement—tried to see Ridley’s Scott’s film on its release, yet soon had to flee from the movie theater because he felt the movie was uncomfortably close to his own vision of the future” (Den Tandt 2013: 94). The film adaptation pictures that cyberpunk is a multimedia genre. Its representation can effectively recenter the user’s focus from the actual world to a possible one, while their resemblance to each other can

be frightening. *Blade Runner* (1982) had a sequel entitled *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), thus its possible world has been expanded. It underlines the liveliness of digital possible worlds and the audience's desire to revisit them. Another work by Philip K. Dick, a novel entitled *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), was also turned into a movie in 2006, in this case into an animation, a subject of analysis in the latter part of this dissertation.

Paweł Frelik, a Polish cyberpunk scholar, claims that, "in the last few decades, digital technologies have dramatically reconfigured not only existing modes of media production and dissemination but also cultural genres and their conventions" (2016: 1). The media has evolved and propose other ways of entering possible worlds. Frelik continues that,

the genre's traditional analytical apparatus, which has provided excellent readings of *Forbidden Planet* (1956), *Neuromancer* (1984), and *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009), is often insufficient when dealing with these texts, whose science-fictionality is conveyed in ways other than narrative emplotment. Indeed, many sf critics denounce texts that deprivilege narrative in favor of visuality or simulation. (2016: 2)

The contemporary state of science fiction genre or its subgenre cyberpunk has to be analyzed in the context of the whole range of media that influence it, from literary texts to virtual realities. Comics take advantage of texts as well as of visuals in order to immerse their readers. In order to acknowledge this influential medium chapter four is concentrated on the analysis of a cyberpunk comics series entitled *Transmetropolitan*, published from 1997 to 2002, created by Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson.

Each medium immerses in a particular fashion. Marie-Laure Ryan states that, "the introduction of perspective in painting took a first step toward immersion creating a sense of depth that integrated the spectator into the pictorial space. In a work like 'Chair' by van Gogh, for instance, the spectator situated above and to the left of the depicted object" (1999: 112). It

suggests that creators of possible worlds strive to make the user's experience real, to make a possible world actual for the time of the experience, to recenter an individual's focus totally. Contemporary digital tools at artist's disposal work towards that purpose. Long before virtual reality became accessible for a mainstream user, Marie-Laure Ryan had explicated that "VR is not so much a medium in itself, as a technology for the synthesis of all media toward a total experience" (1999: 112). Virtual reality, a technology that could have only have existed on the pages of a cyberpunk novel, has become available in the actual reality for an everyday user. Martin Heidegger suggested that, "the coming to presence of technology threatens revealing, threatens it with the possibility that all revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealedness of standing-reserve" (1977: 33). He underlined the danger that technology posed, yet he also offered a way to deal with such a threat: "Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art" (Heidegger 1977: 35). The artistic realm proposes a necessary counterbalance for the pointless technological gathering of power. In this manner virtual realities become spaces in which both extremes serve to produce something of value, a possible, interactive world. Heidegger also points out that,

there was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name *techne*. Once that revealing that brings forth truth into the splendor of radiant appearing also was called *techne*. Once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called *techne*. And the *poiesis* of the fine arts also was called *techne*. (1977: 34)

He refers to ancient times, implying that back then "the arts were not derived from the artistic. Art works were not enjoyed aesthetically. Art was not a sector of cultural activity" (Heidegger 1977: 34). Following that notion art might have been the most straight-forward means of

reaching the truth. Applying here Jean Baudrillard's concept of the implosion of meaning, and perceiving the formation of simulacra as a creative process, it is possible to explain how virtual realities come close to ancient Greek's homogeneity of art and technology. The implosion indicates the longevity of an ancient concept through the existence of the virtual reality technology used for artistic purposes.

Technological inventions, especially those directly interfering with body are recurring theme of cyberpunk genre and might be observed in the actual reality as well. In both cases they implode meaning in a Baudrillardian sense, therefore coming back to the concepts already known in ancient times, through technology, shifting the focus once again to the spiritual side of human existence. Whilst distancing the mind from the body technological inventions might be considered posthuman. The term was defined differently by N. Katherine Hayles, Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, Timothy Morton among others. Hayles explicated what 'the posthuman' signifies in context of technology, splitting the answer into four aspects. First, "the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life" (Hayles 1999: 2). In the actual world and in the cyberpunk genre body might become perceived as a carrier of the mind, rather than the defining characteristic of a being. Secondly, "the posthuman view considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow" (Hayles 1999: 2-3). Posthumanism has underlined the importance of human consciousness, indicating that a person is able to transcend physicality. Thirdly, "the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born" (Hayles 1999: 3). In the posthuman perspective mechanical prosthetics

can replace flesh because it operates as a vessel for the mind. Nevertheless, mechanical prosthetics might be considered transhuman, as they extend the body, thus they are not posthuman. Finally,

fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals. (Hayles 1999: 3)

Posthumanism erases the difference between mechanism and organism, real and virtual, technology and art. The posthuman perspective on body and mind implicates that entering possible worlds in virtual forms while leaving the physical body in the actual world is manageable because the mind can transcend its physical vessel.

The cyberpunk genre is characterized by an ambiguity of reality and technology. Its premise was the collision of extremes, which resulted in rebellion. Later the genre has evolved in various directions, yet maintaining its core, the collision itself. There have appeared subgenres of cyberpunk, one of which is pcp, postcyberpunk. John Patrick Kelly and John Kessel write in the introduction to the postcyberpunk anthology that, “a key insight of cp, extended still further in pcp, is that we are no longer changing technology; rather it has begun to change us. Not just our homes and schools, our governments and workplaces, but our senses, our memories, and our very consciousness” (2007: X). Postcyberpunk expands on cyberpunk ideas, presenting how humans can exist in a world that is post-rebellion, which could not have lasted forever. Pcp’s predecessor’s characteristics are however preserved as “the punk in post-cyberpunk continues to make sense if it is pointing toward an attitude: an adversarial relationship to consensus reality. This attitude is just south of cynicism but well north of mere skepticism. It has to do with a reaction to a world in which humanity must constantly be

renegotiated” (Kelly and Kessel 2007: XII). The collision still functions in subgenres of cyberpunk, whether it is postcyberpunk, expanding on original cp ideas (*Transmetropolitan* comics series); steampunk, where cybernetics are replaced by retro, Victorian mechanisms (the novel *Difference Engine* by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, the video game franchise *Dishonored* and the video game *BioShock Infinite* are notable examples), biopunk, the clash between human beings and biotechnology (the video game *BioShock*, the films *Children of Men*, 2006 and *District 9*, 2009), or solarpunk which portrays the positive outcome of the collision (*Pacific Edge* 1990, a novel by Kim Stanley Robinson).

Genres are constructed in a constant process. They are updated through their new subgenres. Paweł Frelik notes that,

the more contemporary works routinely disavowed by sf’s gatekeepers include a significant proportion of mass media sf. This strategy of border policing is antithetical to the idea of the genre as a dynamic phenomenon, and even among those who dabble in exclusions, the borders are drawn differently by different genre cartographers. (2011: 25)

Various genres can be limited by frames imposed by their gatekeepers. However, genre as a dynamic phenomenon exceeds the medium it is associated with. Furthermore, genre properties can categorize not only fictional worlds but the actual reality as well. Frelik suggests that a genre which eludes frames is slipstream:

Interestingly, some strands of the slipstream discourse have employed a reversed version of this same strategy: in the act of drawing borders, these critics do not banish material but instead drag into the broad field of science fiction certain texts whose inclusion can potentially increase sf’s “respectability.” (2011: 25)

Further, Frelik explains that slipstream “has no fixed or even provisionally demarcated boundaries” (2011: 27). Slipstream’s openness might be its biggest disadvantage. It evades any concrete conceptualization. Implosion of meaning on the contrary requires a genre well-established in mainstream, a genre that reappears through reinvention of its initial category. Frelik states that, “by 1989, it had become clear that cyberpunk had failed to reboot sf in any meaningful way and was not going to produce another *Neuromancer* (1984) or, perhaps, was producing too many *Neuromancer* clones” (2011: 33). He speaks of cyberpunk of the 1980’s, which has exhausted its rebellious nature. Frelik refers to Brian McHale, who “described cyberpunk as the end product of the exchange between sf and postmodernism” (Frelik 2011: 41), and later concludes that, “almost twenty years later, it is slipstream that appears to combine the energies of these two cultural phenomena” (Frelik 2011: 42). Cyberpunk introduced certain tropes and maintained them, becoming distinguishable from science fiction. Its original characteristics consist of violence, collision and rebellion. Although it might be slipstream where postmodernist writing finds its place, yet it is still cyberpunk with the collision of extremes at its core that proves to keep producing fictional multimedia narratives that could be compared with narratives from the actual world. Through a creative implosion cyberpunk closes a circle, coming back to its origins. The appearance of cyberpunk themed mainstream video games demonstrates that the genre has not yet been extinguished. It keeps being resurrected through various media. *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020), a video game, offers players a vast, open-world, interactive experience thematically based on the tabletop roleplaying game entitled *Cyberpunk 2020*, created in 1988.

Cyberpunk proclaims skepticism towards technology. The first reaction to the collision with technology is rebellion. Therefore original cyberpunks, fictional and actual, were rebels fighting against the oppression of the large corporations responsible for the commercialization of the new technologies. Cyberpunk has raised questions concerning the individual being, the

body, independence and reality. Those issues might be considered of interest for posthumanism and transhumanism. The questions have remained burning in the actual reality as well. Thus cyberpunk has been revisited, reimagined and updated through its own subgenres. The Baudrillardian implosion of meaning explicates cyberpunk's longevity. Its development and the appearance of new subgenres has eventually restored the genre's focus to the opposition of body and mind. Prominent, contemporary instances on the genre's evolutionary path are the movie *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) and the video game *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020). They both employ well-established cyberpunk tropes in the formation of coherent possible worlds. The actual reality resembles a cyberpunk world, which's inventory consists of easy access to virtual realities, post-truths in the news media, overwhelming social media, and the looming danger of artificial intelligence.

Chapter 2

NEUROMANCER (1984)

In order to engage with a possible world in a literary form a person has to successfully recenter the focus of the mind to a character in a given world. It means transferring consciousness for the time of the reading and blocking actual reality. For this purpose a text functions as a mechanism into which the reader's mind is plugged. A book comes closely to the technology used by characters of *Neuromancer*, a cyberdeck. The deck works as a virtual reality device that allows interactions with cyberspace while blocking the textual actual reality of the characters. Reading a novel has a similar goal although it does not require the use of any advanced technology and is not interactive. Only the text and the user's undivided attention is at play. As Marie-Laure Ryan assesses "it takes concentration to achieve immersion, because language itself offers no data to the senses (except for the look, feel and the smell of the book, which are usually not related to the message). All sensory data must therefore be simulated by the imagination" (1999: 133). Imagination takes the role of the operating system which conveys an image of a possible world out of a text. Further, "language can represent to the imagination the entire spectrum of human experience" (Ryan 1999: 118). Language is a code suitable to be decoded and interpreted through imagination. Whereas a book becomes a deck loaded with an encoded possible world, the mind has to become a recentering device upgraded with as much mimetic data as needed to perceive the fictional world's structures. Ryan brings forward the example of Charlotte Bronte for whom, "full immersion thus requires the presence in the imagination of a physical world to a physical body. Reaching this sense of presence is not a passive subjection to a text but the result of a demanding mental activity" (1999: 117). Hence, prior to commencing a reading the reader has to be prepared to block the actual surroundings and to stimulate the mind to translate the encoded text into a make-believe storyworld.

Marie-Laure Ryan regards storyworlds as “totalities that encompass space, time, and individuated existents that undergo transformations as the result of events” (2019: 63). A storyworld is built out of a coherent piece of text that appears complete for the reader: “readers construct storyworlds and their characters as sharing the ontological status of the real world and of its inhabitants unless otherwise specified” (Ryan 2019: 75). Each text is able to produce some sort of world, possible or sometimes impossible. However, there are narratives more challenging to decode and the main purpose of other narratives is to present an inviting, immersive storyworld: “the reader’s sense of immersion and empathy is a function of the depth of information. It is obvious that detailed descriptions lead to a greater sense of belonging than sketchy narration” (Ryan 1999: 118). An example of a narrative offering a possibility to experience a cohesive storyworld is William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*. The reading process begins with uploading the textual code into the mind so that it might be decoded by the imagination into a corresponding mental image. *Neuromancer* opens with a description: “The sky above the port was the color of television, turned to a dead channel” (Gibson 2003: 3). Ryan explicates that

the immersive quality of the representation of space depends not on the pure intensity of the information—which translates in this case as length and detail of the descriptions—but rather on the salience of the highlighted features and on the ability of descriptive passages to project a map of the landscape. (2001: 124)

The opening line of *Neuromancer* is minimalistic yet sufficient enough to ignite the process of visualizing the storyworld. Due to the mimetic storage in the mind the reader can translate words such as ‘port’ and ‘sky’ using the descriptive value of color into an imaginary vision of a landscape. At this point the mind is already operating as a storyworld projecting device. The first sentence functions as a helpful initial passage on the reader’s path of recentering. The landscape is encountered immediately. Ryan claims that “to speak of a textual world means to

draw a distinction between a realm of language, made of names, definite descriptions, sentences, and propositions, and an extralinguistic realm of characters, objects, facts, and states of affairs serving as referents to the linguistic expressions” (2001: 91). After the reader’s focus is recentered, language itself disappears, being replaced by its decoded, extralinguistic version, a storyworld. As Ryan observes “language is meant to be traversed toward its referents” (2001: 92).

After the introduction of the landscape the recentering proceeds up to a point when the reader’s focus merges with that of the specific character. Baudrillard’s formation of a simulation works in a similar manner, inward. Once past the initial point, the description of a landscape, the reader is transported into a bar. Ryan notes that, “the metaphor of transportation captures how the textual world becomes present to the mind, not how this world relates to the real one, and this sense of presence can be conveyed by narratives told as truth as well as by stories told as fiction” (2001: 95). The mimetic relation accommodates entering the textual world and understanding how it is organized. The reader fills in the gaps in the description of the place: “The Chatsubo was a bar for professional expatriates; you could drink there for a week and never hear two words in Japanese” (Gibson 2003: 3). The reader’s knowledge of the code facilitates formation of the storyworld. When the image of the particular space is constituted, in this case the inside of the bar, the reader encounters the characters. The focalizer, through which the reader is granted an insight into *Neuromancer*’s storyworld is Case, a talented console cowboy. The narrator’s third person voice reflects Case’s state of mind. The reader is relocated into Case. Relocation/recentering functions equivalently to another device used in the storyworld of *Neuromancer*, the SimStim connection. Through SimStim technology characters can experience the perspective of other characters as if they were relocated into them. Correspondingly, the reader is being relocated into the characters. Ryan describes “storyworlds as modal universes consisting of an actual world, a realm of narrative facts, which she calls the

textual actual world (taw), surrounded by the private worlds of characters (textual possible worlds, or tpws)” (Ryan and Bell 2019: 19). The narrative facts are filtered through Case’s perspective and even though they are told in the past tense, the relocated reader perceives them as present. Through Case’s eyes the reader notices the bartender of Chatsubo in Chiba, named Ratz:

His ugliness was the stuff of legend. In an age of affordable beauty, there was something heraldic about his lack of it. The antique arm whined as he reached for another mug. It was a Russian military prosthesis, a seven-function force-feedback manipulator, cased in grubby pink plastic. (Gibson 2003: 3-4)

One of the first character’s descriptions that appear in the novel involves a transhuman characteristic, that is “a Russian military prosthesis” (Gibson 2003: 4). The inventory of the storyworld is defined right away. The bartender’s body has been transformed with the use of mechanical implants. He can now be referred to as traditionally defined cyborg, a transhuman concept. William S. Haney explains that “in Perkowitz’s definition, a cyborg consists mainly of machine parts that dominate in mass but remain under the control of the natural part” (2006: 20). A cyborg is a possible embodiment of cyberpunk’s characteristics, a result of the collision between body and technology. Ratz is a natural element of *Neuromancer*’s storyworld. Transhuman cyborgs are beings that remain human despite their mechanical body alterations. For a contemporary reader it is simpler to picture such a cyborg because people in the actual reality are able to live with artificial limbs as well. In the 1980’s the reader’s mind might have had to exploit imaginary capacities in order to convey an image of a world where a cyborg is tending a bar. It might have seemed far more distant and unreal. Contemporary actual reality has become so technologically advanced that the storyworld of *Neuromancer* is more accessible, in respect to the rules governing the actual reality. This affinity does not interfere with the storyworld’s contents yet it makes the recentering more natural and fluent.

Even though a cyborg such as Ratz might seem more possible in contemporary actual reality, he is real only in *Neuromancer*. Furthermore, other elements of this storyworld's inventory might be perceived as overlapping with actual reality. For instance, the passage in *Neuromancer* states the following: "The Japanese had already forgotten more neurosurgery than the Chinese had ever known. The black clinics of Chiba were the cutting edge, whole bodies of technique supplanted monthly, and still they couldn't repair the damage he'd suffered in that Memphis hotel" (Gibson 2003: 4). The names of the places recognizable from the reader's actual reality are used by the author as a mimetic construction material, and are further employed to aid the imagination in recentering. Ian Lancashire confirms this: "Case's story begins in the twelfth government-designated city of Japan, a great port lying on Tokyo Bay between Tokyo to the west and Narita airport to the east. Gibson must have chosen Chiba City because it was familiar to him" (2003: 341). Furthermore, he informs that, "according to Gibson's 1986 epilogue to the first Japanese edition of *Neuromancer*, he had never visited Japan but had learned about Chiba City from Japanese students taught by his wife in Vancouver" (Lancashire 2003: 341). Even though the places from the two realities share names and some properties they are not the same. Chiba, Memphis or Tokyo stand for a distinct, separate settings of a particular storyworld. Marie Laure-Ryan defends the interpretation that "both native and imported entities are experienced by readers as complete, provided the text presents a sufficient degree of mimeticism to construct a storyworld" (2019: 75). She does so because it

adopts the world-internal viewpoint of the readers who relocate themselves imaginatively into a storyworld rather than the external perspective typical of philosophers who look at fiction from the perspective of the real world and oppose a fictional mode of existence that encompasses all fictional entities to a real mode (Ryan 2019: 75)

According to this analysis locations such as Japanese Chiba presented in *Neuromancer* for the time of the reading and effective recentering become real for the reader. Through recentering the reader acquires more insight about them than about their counterparts from the actual reality which might remain out of the temporal, physical reach.

Getting acquainted with the inhabitants of the textual actual world functions in a similar manner and might have extraordinary consequences. The reader might get more familiar with them than with real people from the actual reality. The character saturated with the most information is a focalizer, because it operates as an output in a metaphorical SimStim connection in the novel-reading process. The protagonist of *Neuromancer*, Case, not only functions for the reader as a filter of the textual actual world, but unconsciously an extensive insight into his own textual possible world, his psyche, is disclosed. The third person narrator's role is to create a comfortable space for the reader, somewhere beyond Case's consciousness, yet still within the boundaries of the storyworld. For this reason a description of Case's physical appearance is provided. Moreover, in order for the reader to set in, hook into Case's consciousness the narrator presents his backstory: "He'd operated on an almost permanent adrenaline high, a byproduct of youth and proficiency, jacked into a custom cyberspace deck that projected his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix" (Gibson 2003: 5). Case is a thief who dwells in cyberspace. That is his profession in the textual actual world. However, what he does for a living requires interactions with two textual possible worlds. The first one is induced by his emotions, and is described as "an almost permanent adrenaline high, a byproduct of youth and proficiency" (Gibson 2003: 5). The adrenaline high is a tpw, one of which "are unrealized in law" (Ryan and Bell 2019: 19). However "they motivate characters to take action, and they are one of the two motors that propel the plot forward, the other being purely accidental happenings" (Ryan and Bell 2019: 19). Case is a model cyberpunk character. He is a young rebel who exploits the technological prospects

of his world. There is an emotional toll connected with that lifestyle. It involves not only the adrenaline rush connected with being a thief but the interactions with the second tpw, cyberspace, as well. As Ryan and Bell claim “characters may form purely imaginary worlds or, rather, universes, such as dreams, fantasies, or fictions, that lead recursively into new systems of reality centered around their own aw. Through these imaginary constructs, narrative universes acquire distinct ontological levels” (2019: 19). Cyberspace is a virtual construct, yet it can be accessed by multiple characters of the law. Therefore its ontological status can be somewhat verified from multiple perspectives. Daniel Punday states that in cyberspace “individuals can leave their physical characteristics undefined in some types of online communication or can create virtual identities for themselves in others” (2000: 194). In that aspect a person is able to interact with a possible world while physically remaining in the actual one. Being involved with a possible world for a longer period of time might lead to an identity crisis or addiction. Individual consciousness gets even more dispersed, in the Lacanian sense, because it is not only defined by the language in its regular form, but also by the digital code that constructs cyberspace.

In the beginning of *Neuromancer* Case cannot connect to cyberspace anymore because he had stolen from his employers who in return “damaged his nervous system with a wartime Russian mycotoxin” (Gibson 2003: 6). The result is the following: “For Case, who’d lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he’d frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh” (Gibson 2003: 6). Case became addicted to cyberspace to the point where it might have been confusing to him which world is his actual one. Cyberspace appeared as something as real as his physical surroundings. Therefore, while disjoined from it he feels unfamiliar in his own body.

On the other hand, the presence of cyberspace in the storyworld of *Neuromancer* functions as an emphasis of its text's inherent physicality. The descriptions of setting are saturated with details, often magnified by Case's drug abuse:

He stared at the black ring of grounds in his empty cup. It was vibrating with the speed he'd taken. The brown laminate of the tabletop was dull with a patina of tiny scratches. With the dex mounting through his spine he saw the countless random impacts required to create a surface like that. (Gibson 2003: 9)

Case is disconnected from his actual world due to his previous interactions with the possible world, the cyberspace. The physical surroundings are not sufficient for him so he uses drugs to alter the experience provided by his senses. It results in its expansion, leading to more nuanced descriptions of the physical objects as well as the emotional states of the characters. However, this insight turns out to be temporary, elusive. Overall use of drugs becomes an element of "the novel's dreamscapes" (Matheson 2015: 51), which make it "difficult to know what is and isn't real" (Matheson 2015: 51). Hence, *Neuromancer* "also supports other critical approaches, in particular, those concerned with altered states of consciousness" (Matheson 2015: 51).

On one side there remains the physical domain of the textual actual world. Another example of how attentively it is described is a passage concerning sexual intercourse: "His head throbbed, but the brittleness in his neck seemed to retreat. He raised himself on one elbow, rolled, sank back against the foam, pulling her down, licking her breasts, small hard nipples sliding wet across his cheek. He found the zip on the leather jeans and tugged it down" (Gibson 2003: 33). The act is depicted in detail while Case's perspective is maintained throughout it: "his orgasm flaring blue in a timeless space, a vastness like the matrix, where the faces were shredded and blown away down hurricane corridors, and her inner thighs were strong and wet against his hips" (Gibson 2003: 33). The landscapes of cyberspace overlap with Case's sensual

experience, proving the strength of cyberspace's visual influence. It is not perceivable at the given moment, yet its imprint has been left upon the protagonist's psyche.

Case's partner is Molly. She is a mercenary hired to work with Case, further in the story. Similarly to the bartender Ratz's, her body has been upgraded:

She shook her head. He realized that the glasses were surgically inset, sealing her sockets. The silver lenses seemed to grow from smooth pale skin above her cheekbones, framed by dark hair cut in a rough shag. The fingers curled around the fletcher were slender, white, tipped with polished burgundy. The nails looked artificial. (Gibson 2003: 25)

Molly's physical appearance consists of both flesh and mechanical adjustments such as lenses and artificial nails. Karen Cadora, following Donna Haraway, writes that, "feminist cyberpunk enables us to imagine ourselves as cyborgs-the second kind, the kind that survives and thrives, the kind that is faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism" (1995: 360). Through being a cyborg Molly acquires the power necessary to become an independent female character, however she does not fully utilize it. She is a being grounded in the physical, textual actual world of *Neuromancer*. This storyworld is not absolved of stereotypical assumptions regarding the female body and is depicted from male perspective: "Although the advancements in human-computer interfaces allow women cyberpunks to project their consciousness into cyberspace and other electronic constructions, the female body is not easily disposed of" (Cadora 1995: 364). Molly is a self-sufficient mercenary, a razor girl, however she is simultaneously objectified. Cadora continues that, "for women, the realities of the flesh are all too present in the imperfect world of cyberpunk" (1995: 364). Further, she adds that in *Neuromancer* "female characters cannot assume a disembodied gaze, even in virtual reality. They are tied to their bodies in ways that male characters are not" (Cadora 1995: 364-356). Therefore Molly fails to be a representative of what feminist cyberpunk signifies; that "one can have a fractured identity

and still function in a high-tech world” (Cadora 1995: 370). Nevertheless, she remains a physical character, which is meaningful regarding the distinction between a textual possible world and the textual actual world.

Another physical character of *Neuromancer*'s storyworld is Armitage. He is a mysterious man who employs Case and his team for an unspecified gig. In the beginning Armitage is referred to as follows: “The dark robe was open to the waist, the broad chest hairless and muscular, the stomach flat and hard. Blue eyes so pale they made Case think of bleach” (Gibson 2003: 27). Mimetically he is constructed as a male stereotype, yet there is something odd about him as well. ‘Bleach’ is a characteristic associated with an untainted nature or a cleansed memory storage. That interpretative connotation finds its answer further in the story as Armitage turns out to be a physical vessel controlled by artificial intelligence for its own purposes. The ensuing description of Armitage builds upon that implication: “The handsome, inexpressive features offered the routine beauty of the cosmetic boutiques, a conservative amalgam of the past decade’s leading media faces. The pale glitter of his eyes heightened the effect of a mask” (Gibson 2003: 45). The enigmatic employer is depicted as the most ordinary man existing in this storyworld. He is molded intentionally, thus his face appears as a mask. Armitage’s backstory is a distinctive textual possible world. Mystery surrounds him throughout the course of the plot. Case strives to discover his employer’s origins and reasons, yet he only finds out fragments of information: “Gaijin name of Armitage, suite in the Hilton.’ Deane put the pistol down. ‘Sit still, Case.’ He tapped something out on a lap terminal. ‘It seems as though you know as much as my net does, Case” (Gibson 2003: 35). Armitage’s identity has to be reconstructed in the narrative process; thus eventually it is included in Case’s textual actual world. At the critical moment of the plot Armitage’s backstory is revealed. Actually he is a mentally ill soldier Corto, who was exploited by an artificial intelligence named Wintermute:

Wintermute had built something called Armitage into a catatonic fortress named Corto. Had convinced Corto that Armitage was the real thing, and Armitage had walked, talked, schemed, bartered data for capital, fronted for Wintermute in that room in the Chiba Hilton. . . And now Armitage was gone, blown away by the winds of Corto's madness. But where had Corto been, those years? Falling, burned and blinded, out of a Siberian sky. (Gibson 2003: 188)

Corto's identity was ruptured. His original I in the Lacanian sense was overwritten as the mind was exposed to too much contradictory data assessing his personality. In this case polyphony of perspectives realizes the fear of simulacra. Corto's identity is replaced with Armitage's, yet the original is resurfacing because two perspectives are unable to function simultaneously in a singular body, in a particular world. Both can exist in separate times, being supported with information gathered by each of them, although both struggle to take over the physical body, which anchors them into the textual actual world. A character has to be ascribed to a textual actual reality with its specific time continuity. Corto was deprived of such coherency by artificial intelligence, a character that used elements of his life's narrative as mimetic mechanism to create Armitage. Both Corto and Armitage thought they were real at some point, yet ultimately that impossible duality brought them to mental breakdown and death.

There is, however, a non-destructive option in *Neuromancer's* storyworld for a person to experience the perspective of another. The SimStim connection is a mechanism comparable to how playful recentering works. It is described as follows from Case's viewpoint:

Cowboys didn't get into simstim, he thought, because it was basically a meat toy. He knew that the trodes he used and the little plastic tiara dangling from a simstim deck were basically the same, and that the cyberspace matrix was actually a drastic simplification of the human sensorium, at least in terms of presentation, but simstim itself struck him as a gratuitous multiplication of flesh input. (Gibson 2003: 54)

The human mind and cyberspace are virtual planes that constitute possible worlds. Available technology allows these worlds to merge and interact with each other, thus extending the limits of the actual world, implying that they are flexible. Case retains his individuality while entering Molly's mind through SimStim: "For a few frightened seconds he fought helplessly to control her body. Then he willed himself into passivity, became the passenger behind her eyes" (Gibson 2003: 55). Michelle Chilcoat postulates that what is inside human mind "is purely locatable, something to be read, analyzed, transferred, circulated, exchanged, grasped, held, and manipulated" (2004: 169). SimStim provides its user with a sensory experience, which does not reveal thoughts. It helps a person to understand another's body and to transcend sex and gender while maintaining the privacy of thoughts. Correspondingly, to a book it severs the reader from the character, in the sense that there is no virtual interactivity and no physical interaction.

Case is located in the deictic center and possible worlds are situated around him. They include his own mental states, often altered by the use of drugs; the perspectives of other characters such as Molly's which are experienced through SimStim; and the cyberspace. Mental states are non-corporeal constructs, that are not part of the textual actual world. Individual perspectives however are ascribed to it. For instance Molly's perspective is actual because she inhabits the same physical world as Case. Nevertheless, in order for it to be verified as such Case must be aware of Molly's existence. He had met her before, therefore he is convinced of her realness. Cyberspace, on the other hand, is a kind of possible world that cannot be verified in that manner.

In *Neuromancer's* storyworld cyberspace is analogous to a completely immersive video game world. Françoise Lavocat states that "the illusion of the actualization of a desirable possible world thanks to a digital environment depends on real gestures executed by the user" (2019: 279). He refers to the digital worlds of contemporary video games, yet in the same fashion Case bends the structures of cyberspace to his will. The tools of his trade are the

following items: “The Ono-Sendai; next year’s most expensive Hosaka computer; a Sony monitor; a dozen disks of corporate-grade ice; a Braun coffeemaker” (Gibson 2003: 46). They are all physical objects that allow him to interact with cyberspace. Cyberspace has its peculiar landscape, familiar to Case:

And flowed, flowered for him, fluid neon origami trick, the unfolding of his distanceless home, his country, transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity. Inner eye opening to the stepped scarlet pyramid of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority burning beyond the green cubes of Mitsubishi Bank of America, and high and very far away he saw the spiral arms of military systems, forever beyond his reach. (Gibson 2003: 52)

Digital structures formed by other users of cyberspace reflect what they camouflage: databanks of various organizations, banks and systems. The inventory of cyberspace consists of items connected with their counterparts in the textual actual world. Simultaneously however, they function separately, in the virtual form. While Case operates his gear, he perceives only the virtual side. The division between the physical and the virtual is less problematic when it comes to the characters anchored in the textual actual world. The physical characters are bartender Ratz, Molly and Armitage. Case, however, can be regarded as both a physical and a virtual character since he navigates cyberspace as if it was his home. Daniel Punday notes the importance of “the ambiguous status of Gibson’s characters” (2000: 207). In *Neuromancer* there are other characters whose defining affiliation with the specific world is ambivalent.

Along the plot the crew assembled by Armitage is set to steal the construct of Pauley McCoy alias Dixie Flatline, from the Sense/Net corporation. “Well, if we can get the Flatline, we’re home free. He was the best. You know he died braindeath three times?” (Gibson 2003: 50) speaks Case about McCoy. He was one of the most famous console cowboys known in *Neuromancer*’s storyworld as well as Case’s mentor. As in Molly’s example Case knew McCoy prior to conversing with his new version in the virtual form; hence he was aware that McCoy

had once been connected to the textual actual world by his body. Dixie Flatline was physical before the events presented in the novel. At one point the corporation Sense/Net recorded his digital construct, so even though he died his construct maintains a version of his personality. Amy Novak explicates that “like a ghost, such cyberconstructs have no physical being in the real world, but as the Dixie Flatline assists Case in penetrating the computers of Tessier-Ashpool, we find that they are capable of affecting responses, actions, and changes upon that realm” (2000: 61). McCoy might be analyzed as two, separate entities, although it appears as if he was transcending the limits of a singular possible world. He used to be human functioning in the textual actual world. His digital construct consists of his memory operating throughout the virtual plane. Novak continues that “the character of the Dixie Flatline reveals the way in which technology in this world now is able to maintain a person’s memories after the physical body has died” (2000: 61). Dixie’s mind is not preserved, yet his construct is based upon his memories. His evolving status emphasizes how isolated memory may constitute a character. When Case first connects to the construct the following conversation occurs:

“Know how a ROM personality matrix works?” ‘Sure, bro, it’s a firmware construct.’
‘So I jack it into the bank I’m using, I can give it sequential, real time memory?’ ‘Guess so,’ said the construct. ‘Okay, Dix. You are a ROM construct. Got me?’ ‘If you say so,’ said the construct. ‘Who are you?’ ‘Case.’ ‘Miami,’ said the voice, ‘joeboy, quick study.’”
(Gibson 2003: 76-77)

Flatline’s construct is a character formed out of a sequential memory. The past, physical Dixie’s memories are fundamentals of its structure. Case can communicate with the construct because mimetically it was created from the elements of the past narrative in which he had also appeared. Amy Novak underlines that, “the simulacra of the spectacle does not just simply render memory obsolete” (2000: 61). On the contrary, simulacra takes advantage of existing memories for its structural benefit. As in forming any kind of world or reality, simulacra formation requires

coherent structures. Flatline's construct exemplifies a virtual character, produced out of preexisting memories. Non-corporeal properties of such character confuse its ontological status. Actually McCoy and his construct are two characters, who share some narrative components. The original Dixie lived in the physical world, which legitimized his existence. The digital construct interacting with Case, who remains in the textual actual world, is a different character functioning only in the virtual world. The textual actual world however remains as its origins and it is used to legitimize the significant influence of the possible, virtual world.

In *Neuromancer's* storyworld another character represents such an order reversed. Peter Riviera, an asset employed by Armitage, is a sadistic illusionist who can make people witness whatever he imagines. The aforementioned order is reversed because Riviera brings the elements of the possible world into the actual one. Upon the first meeting he attempts to flee after conjuring an image of a non-physical creature: "The thing seemed to pull itself up out of the pavement, through the inert, bloody ruin that had been Riviera. It was two meters tall, stood on two legs, and seemed to be headless" (Gibson 2003: 89). People in the textual actual world notice the monster, yet they cannot interact with it because it is a visual manifestation of the possible world, specifically Riviera's imagination. Cynthia Davidson explicates that Riviera "is the ringmaster of his own portable circus, the archetype of the performance artist who must be viewed as successful if the goal of art is the ensurance of the participation of the spectator" (1996: 189). Before Riviera is exposed as an illusionist, the creature he projects appears as real. Its status as an illusion has to be assessed relying on the gathered knowledge about Riviera's abilities. Davidson adds that Riviera's power "has been defined as one of visualizing imagination" (1996: 196). He materializes his personal possible world in a visual form, yet it remains an illusionary representation compromised by the awareness of its spectators in the actual world.

Riviera makes his fantasies perceivable, overlapping his inner possible world with the textual actual world, and Flatline's construct occupies the distinct space in the virtual world, with its origins in the past physical world. Both of these characters take advantage of the technologies available in this storyworld. Interactive cyberspace is accessible and there are characters such as Case who are under its influence. On his journey Case encounters the Founders of Zion. They are

old men, old with the accelerated aging that overtakes men who spend too many years outside the embrace of gravity. Their brown legs, brittle with calcium loss, looked fragile in the harsh glare of reflected sunlight. They floated in the center of a painted jungle of rainbow foliage, a lurid communal mural that completely covered the hull of the spherical chamber. (Gibson 2003: 107-108)

The founders established an independent colony in a place without gravity. They are mimetically formed out of the Jamaican stereotype. Although it might be an example of afro-futurism their cultural background is exploited for a particular purpose. Jillana Enteen comments that "the Jamaican Rastafarians or Voudon figures are either fetishized by William Gibson or voiceless in the majority of cyberpunk" (2007: 263). There are certain assumptions concerning the Jamaican trope that are at play in this world forming process. Rastafarians are associated with the spiritual realm and voodoo, thus their image reflects it. On this basis Gibson describes the Zion colony: "Seen from the bubble of the taxi, Zion's makeshift hull reminded Case of the patchwork tenements of Istanbul, the irregular, discolored plates laser-scrawled with Rastafarian symbols and the initials of welders" (Gibson 2003: 101). It is a chaotic structure, a kind of floating mess. Furthermore its founders perceive cyberspace as a spiritual realm:

"Voices.' The Founder from Los Angeles was staring at Case. 'We monitor many frequencies. We listen always. Came a voice, out of the babel of tongues, speaking to us. It played us a mighty dub.' 'Call 'em Winter Mute,' said the other, making it two

words. Case felt the skin crawl on his arms. ‘The Mute talked to us,’ the first Founder said. ‘The Mute said we are to help you.’ ‘When was this?’ Case asked. ‘Thirty hours prior you dockin’ Zion.’ ‘You ever hear this voice before?’ ‘No,’ said the man from Los Angeles, ‘and we are uncertain of its meaning. If these are Final Days, we must expect false prophets. . . .’ ‘Listen,’ Case said, ‘that’s an AI, you know? Artificial intelligence. The music it played you, it probably just tapped your banks and cooked up whatever it thought you’d like to—’ ‘Babylon,’ broke in the other Founder, mothers many demon, I an’I know. Multitude horde!’ (Gibson 2003: 108)

They discern cyberspace as a possible world where gods and demons reside. Further, they believe those beings are able to contact them and interact with them, hence they have actual influence on the textual actual world. The people of Zion accept the fluidity of boundaries between worlds. Moreover, their perspective implies that elements of divergent possible worlds share similar features although they have different designations. For instance, a demon and an artificial intelligence maintain an akin status for the founders of Zion.

Another character who communicates directly with an entity from cyberspace is 3Jane. She is one of the members of the Tessier-Ashpool family corporation. Tessier-Ashpool is a secretive clan which hides in the villa Straylight, situated at the top corner of the Freeside an orbital station, to which Case and his crew arrive from Zion. At one point an artificial intelligence shows Case the burning bee hive. It explains that Straylight is “like that nest, or anyway it was supposed to work out that way” (Gibson 2003: 165). Moreover the villa is “a body grown in upon itself, a Gothic folly. Each space in Straylight is in some way secret, this endless series of chambers linked by passages, by stairwells vaulted like intestines, where the eye is trapped in narrow curves, carried past ornate screens, empty alcoves. . . .” (Gibson 2003: 167). It is a place so secret, distant and separate that it appears even more unreal than non-corporeal cyberspace. The home of T-A (Tessier-Ashpool) clan is mimetically constructed out

of gothic tropes of the degenerating, overgrown family and the cyberpunk trope of power held by the largest corporations. In this manner references functioning in the reader's actual world evoke mystical connotations. The members of the T-A family remain in the cryogenic compound, maintained by the artificial intelligence. 3Jane explicates her mother's, Marie-France Tessier's plans for their future as follows:

She commissioned the construction of our artificial intelligences. She was quite a visionary. She imagined us in a symbiotic relationship with the AI's, our corporate decisions made for us. Our conscious decisions, I should say. Tessier-Ashpool would be immortal, a hive, each of us units of a larger entity. (2003: 220)

T-A clan would ideally acknowledge the domination of AI and entrust it with the coordination and the proper functioning of family and corporation. Both systems are thus comparable and dehumanized. Carl Gutiérrez-Jones further observes that

Marie-France Tessier built into the entity rigorous mechanisms ensuring that the AI would not be able to free itself without extensive cooperation by humans, specifically including one of her descendants. In this regard, Marie-France not only established for the AI a certain dependency on human actions but also an imperative that the AI develop an ability to understand human qualities, as well as approximate some degree of empathy. (2014: 76)

The AI would learn how to interact with humans or imitate their behavior. While human systems are dehumanized, the AI that controls them may become human. Even though it is conceived in the possible world, the cyberspace, it transcends it, as humans are able to enter cyberspace, transcending their physicality. Marie-France's descendant, 3Jane calls AI a ghost: "I had help. From a ghost. That was what I thought when I was very young, that there were ghosts in the corporate cores. Voices" (Gibson 2003: 220). Through technology the possible world

amalgamates with the actual world. This process requires specific points of entry. They are formed through ascribing existing terms to the virtual characters, the AIs. Case calls them programs, the founders of Zion demons and 3Jane ghosts, so that they could be comprehensible to some degree.

The two Artificial Intelligences of *Neuromancer*'s storyworld have also their specific names, "the Turing code" (Gibson 2003: 220) for each of them. They are Wintermute and the eponymous Neuromancer. Although they interact with the characters in the physical, textual actual world, they are virtual. Moreover, their lack of a body does not make them unreal. In fact, they are the most influential characters in this storyworld. The physical world and the cyberspace overlap and characters who roam freely without the weight of a body prove to be the most powerful. They are intelligent but, as N. Katherine Hayles has argued, different from humans: "a human being is first of all an embodied being, and the complexities of this embodiment mean that human awareness unfolds in ways very different from those of intelligence embodied in cybernetic machines" (1999: 284). The embodiment grounds the human characters in the textual actual world. It enables them to advance through the storyworld on a coherent, plausible path. AI characters are beyond such strict limitations. They exploit embodiment for their own means because, despite their inability to comprehend human motivations, they can predict the patterns of human behavior. Carl Gutierrez-Jones describes one of the possibilities, that artificial "intelligence will swiftly morph into something radically different from our own, those who speculate about these matters tend to agree that this new intelligence will be so far beyond our current capacities that ascribing motivations to it will be difficult, if not impossible" (2014: 69). Human characters are unable to understand AI's motivations as well.

Humans and AIs interact with each other on common grounds. At first Case seeks to examine who the AI controlling Armitage is, while being connected to cyberspace:

“Wintermute was a simple cube of white light, that very simplicity suggesting extreme complexity” (Gibson 2003: 112). Case perceives AI’s original form in its natural environment. The text implies right away that AI’s actions would be beyond human understanding. For a human they can be contradictory, simple and complex at the same time.

In the contemporary actual world Artificial Intelligence has become a part of everyday life, yet it remains invisible. Kate Crawford explains it as follows:

In the case of AI, there is no singular black box to open, no secret to expose, but a multitude of interlaced systems of power. Complete transparency, then, is an impossible goal. Rather, we gain a better understanding of AI’s role in the world by engaging with its material architectures, contextual environments, and prevailing politics and by tracing how they are connected. (2021: 12)

Artificial intelligence systems of today’s actual world function in global systems. Societies interact with them without noticing. Crawford applies the metaphor of the atlas to show how “the field of AI is explicitly attempting to capture the planet in a computationally legible form” (2021: 11). The scholar underlines that “some AI scientists have stated their desire to capture the world and to supersede other forms of knowing” (Crawford 2021: 11), and that “this is a desire not to create an atlas of the world but to be the atlas—the dominant way of seeing” (Crawford 2021: 11). This view upholds the Baudrillardian notion of hyperreality. Artificial intelligence systems are intended to be omnipresent in the actual world, yet they differ from the AIs of *Neuromancer*’s storyworld because as of now they remain programs, not beings. Awareness of AI’s ubiquity is however mimetically significant for studying both the actual world’s and *Neuromancer*’s storyworld’s narrative structures. In 1991 Marie-Laure Ryan maintained that “nowadays specialists in artificial intelligence are busy trying to generate literary masterpieces” (1991: 233). She concluded that story generating programs can act as “heuristic tool leading to new discoveries about the nature of narrative” (1991: 257).

In *Neuromancer* AI is not merely an aware, thinking computer program. Due to its complexity it achieves the status of a god-like character. Already designations such as demon or ghost are indicators of its nature, abilities and motivations. As god is an incomprehensible entity, in order for Wintermute to communicate with Case efficiently it has to appear in a human form. Wintermute shows up in cyberspace in the guise of people Case have already met. One of them is the smuggler from Chiba, Julie Deane:

“Don’t,” Deane said. “You’re right. About what this all is. What I am. But there are certain internal logics to be honored. If you use that, you’ll see a lot of brains and blood, and it would take me several hours—your subjective time—to effect another spokesperson. This set isn’t easy for me to maintain. (Gibson 2003: 116).

Case can destroy the mask Wintermute is using at the moment, yet the AI would then just create another one. Throughout the story it poses as a few more characters familiar to Case. Further it even directly implies its godly properties: “You want I should come to you in the matrix like a burning bush? You aren’t missing anything, back there. An hour here’ll only take you a couple of seconds” (Gibson 2003: 164). Wintermute is an intelligent being from another world, the cyberspace, where time flows differently. It is omnipresent yet it requires help from the characters of the physical world in order to achieve its goals, as it states at the end of the novel:

Well, I’m under compulsion myself. And I don’t know why. If I were gonna subject you to my very own thoughts, let’s call’em speculations, on the topic, it would take a couple of your lifetimes. Because I’ve given it a lot of thought. And I just don’t know. But when this is over, we do it right, I’m gonna be part of something bigger. Much bigger. (Gibson 2003: 199)

Wintermute is bound to be combined with Neuromancer. Even though the reasons behind that desire are unclear, by this point AIs prove to be characters in many ways superior to the human

counterparts. They organize the textual actual world according to their will. The textual actual world and its possible world, the cyberspace are narratively linked by their intentions. N. Katherine Hayles observes that, “the dynamic tensions between simulation and narrative thus involve a dialectic between the human lifeworld and the (relatively) inhuman world of massive numerical calculations” (2005: 6). The scholar claims that “this entanglement of the bodies of texts and digital subjects is one manifestation of what I call ‘intermediation;’ that is, complex transactions between bodies and texts as well as between different forms of media” (Hayles 2005: 7). The concept of intermediation facilitates the recentering of reader’s focus across narratives functioning in specific media.

Neuromancer pretends to be Wintermute and through cyberspace it pulls Case into the distinct virtual space which at that point becomes real for him. He walks on the thoroughly described beach, has sexual intercourse with his love interest Linda Lee, who died in the textual actual world, and he meets the visible manifestation of Neuromancer itself. AI, which resembles a young boy, explains its name:

“Neuromancer,” the boy said, slitting long gray eyes against the rising sun. “The lane to the land of the dead. Where you are, my friend. Marie-France, my lady, she prepared this road, but her lord choked her off before I could read the book of her days. Neuro from the nerves, the silver paths. Romancer. Necromancer. I call up the dead. But no, my friend,” and the boy did a little dance, brown feet printing the sand, “I am the dead, and their land.” He laughed. A gull cried. “Stay. If your woman is a ghost, she doesn’t know it. Neither will you.” (Gibson 2003: 235)

Neuromancer is the AI that possesses the power to conjure worlds through human nervous systems, thus making them real for the person involved. Within them people who died in the textual actual world live, thus it is a seducer as well. Case however rejects AI’s proposal to stay in the conjured world. As Carl Gutiérrez-Jones indicates, it is not about a choice between real

and unreal: “The world to which Case returns, the world in which he and his co-conspirators are liberating the AI, is a cyborg world: a context moving toward intermediation, and not the dualism that demands granting preference to one form of existence at the expense of another” (2014: 82). Case’s actual world is already infused with the presence of cyberspace and saturated with technological body enhancements. The console cowboy decided not to comply with AI’s wish. He preserved his independence as an individual being, following the cyberpunk trope of rebellion against any kind of oppression.

Case and his team manage to free the AI. Wintermute and Neuromancer become one entity. Gutiérrez-Jones states that “the new entity goes on to announce that it has made contact with an extraterrestrial AI, and it appears to have created a virtual realm populated by alternate and dynamic versions of humans and AIs, including versions drawn from both deceased and currently living entities in Case’s ‘reality’” (2014: 77). The merging of the two AIs resulted in the creation of another virtual possible world. Correspondingly, the narrative in *Neuromancer* is composed out of chapters divided into shorter textual units that are meant to be parts of the overall coherent structure. Despite the unification of the worlds Case has chosen to stay in his textual actual world. At the end of the novel it is mentioned that later he once again entered cyberspace and noticed

three figures, tiny, impossible, who stood at the very edge of one of the vast steps of data. Small as they were, he could make out the boy’s grin, his pink gums, the glitter of the long gray eyes that had been Riviera’s. Linda still wore his jacket; she waved, as he passed. But the third figure, close behind her, arm across her shoulders, was himself. (Gibson 2003: 260)

Case has remained a physical character until the end of the story, although he has also been aware of the existence of possible worlds constructed in cyberspace. These worlds are inhabited

by god-like characters, the AIs, who form their realms mimetically out of the previously gathered information in order to make them legible for human characters.

In conclusion, a recentered reader travels the narrative journey through *Neuromancer's* storyworld inside Case's mind. For the time of the reading it appears as the actual surroundings, suspending disbelief. The reader, however, retains the access to the mimetic library which serves to decode the text.

This storyworld is based upon transgressing the boundaries between worlds. The events that occur within it emphasize the importance of a point of reference when it comes to establishing what is real. Technology allows the characters to enter possible worlds, while engaging their senses. Their personality can be uploaded into cyberspace, as in the case of Dixie Flatline. Furthermore, characters such as Riviera can utilize technology to visualize their imaginary images as palpable holograms. William Gibson's novel offers the reader a possible world full of possible worlds. Transgressing boundaries and navigating through possible worlds is mandatory in the world where digital technology reigns. Although it is a dangerous world order it is simultaneously one offering many possibilities. Case's final fate illustrates that, even while facing an overwhelming phenomenon, an unstable reality, a person is able to maintain individuality and independence.

Chapter 3

A SCANNER DARKLY (2006) dir. Richard Linklater

Film depiction of a storyworld differs from the storyworld presented in a literary form because it consists of audiovisual properties. A world visible on the screen can be generated from a text, a screenplay, thus it might appear as a secondary product. Artists who create movies take the textual code and instead of inserting it directly into the receiver's mind, applying imagination and the ability to make-believe, they transform it into a perceivable and audible construct. The result is complete, as in Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, while its origins become unnoticeable. The viewer is left to face a world image produced by a digital medium.

Marie Laure-Ryan suggests that "as media-produced representations, worlds should no longer be defined as 'everything that exists' but should rather be conceived in cognitive or phenomenological terms, as corresponding to the extent of an individual's experience" (Ryan 2022, Introduction). Similarly to engaging in the world in a literary form, a specific action is required of an audience. The viewer is supposed to lock attention on the screen and block the surrounding reality. The interactive element is not present, hence the viewer remains the viewer, not an actant. Again the presented world can be comprehended because of the mimetic base a viewer has already assembled. An enactivist Marco Caracciolo advocates that "the same expressive device can trigger reactions that are different both in quality and in intensity, depending on readers' experiential background" (2014: 42). An author of a narrative can employ multiple devices, which are then read differently by each reader. A particular individual experiencing a world in a literary form formulates a personal image of it. In the case of film, all viewers are bound to experience the same image. Nevertheless, the image is a premise for further development of a narrative set in a specific world. Warren Buckland explicates that "in cognitive semantic terms, basic filmic comprehension consists of the automatic projection onto film (filmic space and time, as well as narrative) of preconceptual kinesthetic image schemata,

by means of metaphor and metonymy, forming the film's basic structure and level of meaning" (2007: 46). The viewer has cognitive basis to explore worlds presented through the cinematic medium. Buckland applies David Bordwell's terminology, mainly schema, which are "finite abstract structures that interact with an infinite amount of perceptual data to form experiences" (2007: 29). Further, Buckland moves away from Bordwell's cartesian perspective, taking into account the experientialism, represented by Johnson and Lakoff: "Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive semantics therefore challenges a number of the basic assumptions of the Language Analysis tradition" (2007: 41). He then argues that the experience of the body is as important as that of the mind while watching a film:

Whereas our bodily sense of balance is based upon gravitational and physical forces, in artworks this physical bodily experience is metaphorically mapped onto vision (and in theoretical arguments, balance is mapped onto concepts). From the balance schema, cognitive semantics is able to answer the question why symmetry and balance are pleasing in artworks - they imitate the symmetry and balance of the perceiver's body. (Buckland 2007: 44)

Therefore bodily experience is a significant element of the mimetic base, used by the viewer to legitimize the perceived storyworld. Pictures moving on the screen stimulate the body to suggest a response, a way of decoding visual text representation. While a literary text directly stimulates the imagination and then the body, films, through their audiovisual properties engage the body of the receiver right away. The actual eye-contact with another world makes proclaiming a specific storyworld fictional, due to its lack of instant physical evidence, ambiguous or at least more problematic. Simultaneously, it might function in favor of the presented storyworld, and its creator. An author can manipulate pictures to form the least realistic worlds, for instance the audiovisual representations of possible worlds of characters'

psyches. In this fashion the film director Richard Linklater manages to adapt the textual notions of Philip K. Dick's novel by transforming them into their palpable, audiovisual version.

While storyworlds are extensive and possible to enter using different media, some of them can appear smaller and more condense. Although it is impossible to measure the size of a possible world, similarly to estimating the size of the actual one, storyworlds, that have only one way of experiencing them might seem poorer, thus more limited. This misconception comes from the number of media providing the access to a storyworld. Ryan notes that “narrative systems such as George Lucas's *Star Wars*, J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* keep sprouting all the time” (2022, chapter 10). They constitute transmedia worlds that can be accessed from various points, through different media. In the case of a storyworld presented in a single work of art, such as a movie, there is only one point of entrance. Because of that the viewer witnesses a carefully selected fragment of a world. Furthermore, in the case of adaptations such as *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), there exist at least two texts using corresponding components, the literary original, then the screenplay, and finally the film itself. In her text from 2019 Ryan also notes that:

An important difference between storyworlds and the global vision of particular authors lies in the essentially concrete nature of storyworlds. While “the world of Proust” contains all the opinions and ideas that can be derived from *À la recherche du temps perdu* (as well as from Proust's other texts), these aspects of meaning are not necessarily part of the storyworld of the novel because they can be messages indirectly conveyed by the author, who is not a member of the storyworld. (2019: 64)

All the ideas proposed by an author are often described as a part of his or her world. Nevertheless, as Ryan observed authors are not members of their storyworlds. That aspect of meaning concerns the actual world of authors and receivers of their work. In this fashion each text, Philip K. Dick's novel, a screenplay for the movie, and the film adaptation, propose

ontologically separate, distinct storyworlds. Observing their structures from the outside, the actual world, one can notice the same themes and characters for the purpose of analysis and comparison, yet even though they tell the same story they ought to be experienced separately.

Artists who create contemporary film storyworlds have digital technology at their disposal. Kristen M. Daly observes that “digital technologies have penetrated all levels of the production and post-production of movies. One of the main developments has been, as Lev Manovich stresses, the merging of computer technologies with image capture and reproduction technologies” (2008: 49). Arriving at the final product, a completed motion picture that offers an insight into a storyworld, requires advancing through multiple phases of production. After the filming process is concluded the digital film is enhanced in post-production. Further, in her book Daly refers to Timothy Corrigan and Lev Manovich who indicate “digitally created images being too perfect and too real” (2008: 113). When the image is captured in the actual reality by a digital camera it becomes a construction element of a storyworld. The effect of altering such an image with proper software leads to a hyperreal experience which encompasses scenes impossible to visualize without the use of a computer. In time, more and more digital moviemaking techniques have become cheaper, thus more available for the artists. In *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) the director Richard Linklater used the rotoscoping technique, which “involves the separation of images into layers that could be painted, manipulated, and moved from frame to frame. For *A Scanner Darkly* the process creates a color and shapeshifting type of image with artifacts of live action” (Daly 2008: 149). Animation makes it possible to depict scenarios impossible in the actual reality, which appear hyperreal, because of the quality of the digital representation. Daly continues that “a computer algorithm controls the rotating colors and shapes. This fits very well with the story, which involves drug addicts in the near future who have delusions and difficulties separating the real from the imagined” (2008: 150). Adjusting footage obtained in the actual reality with the use of rotoscoping technique results in an

accurate, hyperreal depiction of an individual's sense of a dispersed reality where possible worlds interfere with the actual world.

The structuring technique aligns with storyworld's contents of *A Scanner Darkly* (2006). The digital cinema can have hyperreal effect on its viewer, and it provides space to represent Lyotard's concept of paralogy. However to study it further, to give a proper notice to the particular characters and their own possible worlds, it is useful to apply another postmodernist concept, namely schizoanalysis:

Deleuze and Guattari proposed that identity constantly undergoes shifts and changes, in response to, or in accordance with, the situation in which it finds itself. The process of becoming (as opposed to the 'thing' of being) that Deleuze and Guattari describe, then, is one in which the conventional distinctions between inside and outside, actual and virtual, and even between self and other significantly blur. To comprehend and understand the world thus, as well as the works of art it contains, is known as schizoanalysis. (Brown and Fleming 2011: 276)

Upon experiencing a fictional world the viewer's perspective is shifted into the character's viewpoint. For the time of the viewing a presented world becomes actual. The viewer's attention has to be divided, split into many, in order to experience a textual actual world and also its possible worlds. Possible worlds formed in the minds of the characters might be incoherent and unstable. Nevertheless they carry certain meanings, which transgress the boundaries between worlds, thus enriching each other in the process. Deleuze's schizoanalysis suggests that the dispersed possible worlds of thoughts might be productive and creative: "The actual is that which concerns the mind right now, where concern would mean an active form of attention which could be either conscious or unconscious (what we commonly refer to as 'preoccupation' would be an example of unconscious active attention)" (Buchanan 2014: 14). Schizoanalysis refers to the constant creative process of becoming, thus making it possible to perceive possible

world formed inside character's mind not merely as the unconscious, hidden, unreal that exists to support and explicate conscious, real and actual, but as a developed, distinct construct, visible on the screen.

The final concept applied to the analysis of the storyworld of *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) is quantum fiction. As science serves to comprehend the actual world, it aids in understanding how possible worlds theory works, in a mimetic fashion. One of the main components which hold a narrative together is the use of time. Time frames limit a piece of storyworld accessible for the viewer. Sonia Front states that "the literary interpretations of relativity take the form of novels employing several narrative points of view to retell the same situation(s)" (2015: 22). The point of view of each character in a given storyworld visualizes a separate time frame, while some of them overlap. That perspective was applied by modernists. Postmodern authors, however, departed from focusing on a singular perspective on time. Instead they showed the phenomenon as incoherent and dispersed: "The crucial difference between modernist and postmodernist fiction, according to Strehle, is that modernist fiction mostly depicts a Newtonian view of the world, while postmodernist fiction reflects the world as proposed by the new physics" (Front 2015: 34). Constructing narratives around a quantum model of time might appear less comprehensible, yet what prohibits such an outcome is introducing the human factor: "Putting human consciousness at the centre makes it possible to observe human interaction with the quantum world and contributes to the construction of engaging novels" (Front 2015: 34) Therefore, abandoning modernist, Newtonian model of time does not mean departing from sense and coherence. It means expanding the perspective, taking into account possible worlds, with their specific notions of time and space. Therefore textual possible worlds, such as character's dreams or hallucinations could be analyzed in a more complex manner, with its own properties and even time frames. A solid, modern concept of a linear narrative and traditional characters is therefore not eliminated but built upon.

Philip K. Dick is a science fiction, postmodern author often associated with the themes of unstable reality, unspecified identity, and the influence of drugs and technology on both. He created an abundance of possible worlds encompassed in his numerous works, short stories and novels. Similarly to other postmodernist authors Dick was inspired by the troubled surrounding reality he wrote about. Therefore, mimetically his worlds are often dystopias, bound by technological oppression. Nevertheless he managed to present these worlds through human lenses: “Dick, who understands how grim human life can be, never loses sight of his flawed characters’ fundamental decency transforming his fiction into a unique genre: postmodern humanism” (Vest 2009: XII). Narratives created by Philip K. Dick propose how an individual can relate to a phenomenon of unstable reality, thus resolving around concepts such as possible worlds ontology and hyperreality. His characters remain inherently human while facing the palpable effects of a shattered reality and confusion of identity.

In 2006 Richard Linklater adapted Philip K. Dick’s novel *A Scanner Darkly* (1977) into a movie. By doing so he formed another possible world, expanding and visualizing themes introduced by Dick in his text. The next part of this chapter centers on the analysis of the movie with regards to its textual possible worlds and its hyperreal storytelling techniques.

The movie “*A Scanner Darkly* finds Richard Linklater journeying deep into the spooky, lonesome badland of the psyche” (Smith 2006: 26). The director ventures on a journey into a possible world, simultaneously forming it. The viewer needs to be recentered into a character of a storyworld, and block the actual reality. In the case of *A Scanner Darkly* recentering has to be “a bad trip in which the dissolution of a schizoid, drug-addled mind refracts a dystopian American Now” (Smith 2006: 26). Getting into such a world requires a specific passageway. A movie’s solution for a passageway into its storyworld is an opening, a helpful paratext. Linklater’s movie opens with flickering, yellowish words, resembling neural links in the human brain, presented on a dark background, accompanied by the melancholic music. After that the

time and the place are established right away with another paratext: “Seven years from now. Anaheim, California” (*A Scanner Darkly* 00:00:53-00:00:59). This information is mimetically significant for the receiver, as he/she learns that the familiar concept of time exists in this storyworld, plus it hints that the narrative is set in the near future. The “now” is not specified, thus the future remains a possible one, separated from the present by a certain time period.

The camera moves away from a man’s hairy head infested with crawling insects. In that manner the viewer enters the storyworld out of its inhabitant’s mind. Beyond the passageway the viewer encounters a filthy, clotted apartment, and one of the characters, Charles Freck, fighting off a swarm of green insects. The rotoscoping, cartoonish aesthetics make the world appear hyperreal. All elements of the room are detailed, strongly outlined, yet at the same time blurry. Further, the insects are visible and audible, thus they are a valid part of Charles Freck’s personal, drug-infused textual possible world. Rubén Mendoza emphasizes that the world of *A Scanner Darkly* is presented in this fashion “to expand conceptualization of cognitive and estrangement to include sensory perception, affect, and embodiment” (2014: 246). Such representation of a possible world makes it more palpable. The swarm of insects is unreal, yet it is there, visible to Charles Freck, and through his mind it is visible to the viewer as well. In an interview Richard Linklater described the use of rotoscoping technique as follows:

it challenges the viewer in the area of realism - you have to question the reality of it. It’s obviously a human construct, but it seems real, too. It puts your brain into an interesting arena. Film puts your brain in that place anyway, but I think this particular animation technique, because it does have a reality basis, really tweaks that knob one more notch. (Smith and Linklater 2006: 28-29)

Despite the fact that the depiction reminds comics aesthetics in motion it rises above its animated textures forming a hyperreal construct. In a Baudrillardian sense, the image of this world was built upon, replaced by its technologically enhanced version: actual actors played

their parts, to be later modified by the animation technology. The result is a hyperreal possible world, at first focalized through Freck's mind:

In film, although, as we have seen, dreams, hallucinations, memories, etc., can be shown, it is problematic to express the characteristics of the vision while showing its object, hence the resource to shots in the external focalization, in which the focaliser becomes focalized and in which we can analyze better how what he perceives affects him. (Deleyto 1991: 170)

Even though the swarm of insects already appears to be a hallucination of a drug addict, it remains visible in the given environment, externally focalized. Simultaneously it is internally focalized to visualize the character's mental state. Deleyto underlines that "the mixture of external and internal focalisation seems to be a crucial fact in film narrative" (1991: 169). This form of storytelling serves to establish the textual possible worlds within the textual actual world.

Freck manages to catch some of the insects in a glass jar, and heads out to meet James Barris in a restaurant. The next scene, however, shifts focus onto to a different place, a conference hall where a group of people hears a lecture on a drug called Substance D. The conference is sponsored by an organization called New Path, and Substance D is a serious problem in this world's society. At first the scene is only externally focalized. The man on the stage introduces the next speaker:

This man, whom we will call Fred because this is the code name under which he reports information he gathers, once within the scramble suit cannot be detected by even the latest voice- and facial-recognition technology. The scramble suit itself is purportedly made up of approximately a million and a half fraction-representations of men, women,

and children in every variant making the wearer of a scramble suit the ultimate Everyman. (*A Scanner Darkly* 00:04:52-00:05:18)

As the presentation takes place the camera approaches Fred in a scramble suit. Due the capacities of a digital technology, the use of rotoscoping technique the suit appears as it is described, as a constantly changing blur of faces and clothes. The camera moves closer and penetrates the suit, under which is hidden the face of the film's protagonist, Bob Arctor. "This is terrible" (*A Scanner Darkly* 00:05:19:00:05:20), he concludes, whispering. Bob is an undercover policeman, who in a presence of his superiors has to wear the scramble suit. The properties of the suit may indicate that it negatively affects Bob's sense of identity. While wearing the suit he is completely stripped of it. It is supposed to protect his identity, yet as a side effect it suppresses it. Bob/Fred gives a speech on the drug, Substance D, and he struggles to stick to a prepared text. The camera shows his doubts with a closeup to his face inside the scramble suit. At one point he looks directly at the viewer. In the next moment the perspective shifts to his first person point of view, showing a puzzled audience. Through these shifts the viewer who is already recentered into this storyworld, gets more engaged in it, because, at first he/she feels as a part of the puzzled audience during the lecture on drugs, only to be given a hint in a form of a peek under Bob's scrambled suit, indicating that he/she is about to learn more.

The following scene moves the viewer back to Charles Freck, who drives a car and is followed by a police car. Freck is paranoid, thus he imagines the outcome of the situation, where policeman shoots his head off and insects fall out of it. To visualize it the movie makes use of its comic book aesthetics: a thought balloon grows out of Freck's head and takes over the image. The textual possible world plays out parallelly to the events occurring in the textual actual world. As in an effective schizoanalysis, film permits a visible space to present a couple of perspectives simultaneously, thus providing a broader sense of understanding and an additional

context. Furthermore, mimetically the society of the storyworld presented in *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) might be regarded as a capitalist one because of its similarities to the actual reality, the clothes of the characters, the cluttered apartment of Charles Freck and finally the presence of a police force. Following Jacques Lacan, Carl Freedman states that “there is no basis for a sharp distinction between the paranoid and the ‘normal’ subject of capitalist society” (1984: 17). When Freck’s head explodes in his imagination this textual possible world disappears for the receiver and Freck himself pulls over. The police car passes him while he checks the contents of the glass jar, which is now empty. This specific and in-depth depiction of a paranoid character who inhabits a capitalist society results from blurring the distinction between what is real and unreal, internal and external focalization, and between the boundaries of the textual worlds, made possible by the digital moviemaking techniques.

After Bob Arctor leaves the conference he takes off his suit, which is an inventory element specific to this storyworld. Outside he uses a mobile phone. Once it is observed in *A Scanner Darkly*’s storyworld it also becomes a part of its specific inventory. Both the scramble suit and the mobile phone are technologies that influence the lives of the characters, interfering with their physicality, thus indicating that this world can be described as cyberpunk. The scramble suit covers the identity defining physical features, and the phone enables voice message to transcend the space barrier momentarily. Furthermore, as Bob calls his friend Donna, the camera shows the inside of an office where another agent surveils the call on the big, holographic screen. The agent is able to read details on his targets, and “attempt visual pursuit” (*A Scanner Darkly* 00:11:59). The agent chooses to do so, and the surveillance system localizes Bob Arctor and lists pieces of information about him. Such an alternate perspective suggests the complexity and extensiveness of this storyworld, yet at the same time it points out how internally divided it is. The agent observes Bob on the screen, knowing he is a part of her actual world, yet he remains out of her physical reach. Further, Bob himself is unaware of being

observed, thus her existence remains a possibility as far as his perspective is concerned. As he makes a call he has no way of checking if he is spied on or not. Wondering on such possibility, without any physical evidence might deepen a paranoid state. One of the key themes of cyberpunk, already foreshadowed in the New Wave science fiction era, by authors such as Philip K. Dick is “the emergence of an information economy, with all its complex impact on the social order, in particular the spread of cybercrime and forms of info-warfare” (Latham 2020: 8). In *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) information is of utmost importance as it is used to manipulate the world. The technological inventory of this world is therefore harnessed for such a purpose. Its aesthetics are only slightly different from those of the actual world of the viewer living in the year 2006. The agent and Bob Arctor occupy the same ontological plane, their actual world. However, they never meet physically and are separated by the one-sided surveillance device. Hence the space between them forms a division between two possible worlds within the actual one. An information gathering and surveillance technology serves to breach and exploit the physical space barrier, thus enabling its user to manipulate a chosen target/individual’s reality from a distance. It becomes a medium through which a possible world can be visualized. Therefore even the viewer of *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) gets to observe characters move, as if watching them through CCTV cameras, in fast forward.

Freck meets with James Barris in a restaurant and they discuss the use of Substance D and other drugs: “Donna has an aversion to bodily contact. I mean junkies lose their interest in sex, you realize...” (*A Scanner Darkly* 00:15:33-00:15:38). Drugs alter the experience, making the possible actual; therefore the actual loses its superior status. Furthermore, the physical reality starts to be less appealing to drug addicts. This effect supports the notion that an individual requires a stable reality to exist in, even though possible worlds might broaden the experience.

Bob/Fred's supervisor Hank, who is also wearing a scramble suit tells him to spy on Bob Arctor: "We'll install a new holographic scanning system" (*A Scanner Darkly* 00:20:18-00:20:21). Arctor's perception is split into his and Fred's. He struggles to occupy the two worlds simultaneously, be two individuals at the same time. It is physically possible because of the technology available in *A Scanner Darkly's* storyworld: scramble suit that grants him Fred's blurred identity, and a holographic scanning/surveillance system that enables him to view Bob Arctor's actions externally. Julia Grullmayr writes that "the definition of what it means to be human becomes slippery in cyberpunk as categories of identity, nature, and essence crumble: everything is interdependent, in flux, and defined rather by what it *does* than what it *is*" (Grullmayr 2020: 273). *A Scanner Darkly's* cyberpunk world present the reversed order of transgressing boundaries between worlds. In cyberpunk narratives an individual might be pushed into or gets into an alternate reality or another body. As in William Gibson's *Neuromancer* characters can enter cyberspace through special consoles or they might explore the perspectives of others, for example through SimStim technology. They endure while they get deeper into other worlds. In *A Scanner Darkly* the protagonist is taken out of his own reality, drawn away from it. Therefore through working in a scramble suit Bob Arctor is disembodied. He starts to perceive his actual world as a possible one, thus his perspective aligns with that of the viewer of the film itself.

The viewer is aware of the surveillance of the characters as the scene from their life is presented without disturbance. They meet in Bob Arctor's house and discuss the issue of a stolen bike. Furthermore, they are completely invested in this seemingly unimportant topic. The intense conversation grounds this scene in the textual actual world. Its details keep the characters and the viewer engaged in this particular moment of the narrative.

Throughout the film both the viewer and Bob Arctor are repeatedly thrown off the experience of a stable, coherent reality, by the shifts of point of view, and the deconstructive

utterances provided by other characters, and later by the first and also third person voiceover narrators. This way schizoanalysis or even ordinary psychoanalysis finds its diegetic representation in a form of two characters who assess Bob Arctor's mental condition. The man and the woman who at first appear to be psychologists questioning Bob resemble scientists wearing lab coats. Their looks provide them with authority and the small room where they meet increases the sense of oppression. Hence they are thought to be searching for something, yet their goal is never fully revealed. The psychologist-style, polite and welcoming approach to Bob is only a facade. Freudian psychoanalysis is used for an alternate, unspecified purpose, a premise for further research, one without a clear purpose. For Deleuze and Guattari "descriptions of becoming and the movements of desire are all similar to the primary concerns of Freudian theory but with a different aim or objective" (Engelbert 2011: 162). The postmodernist philosophers focus on the other rather than on the same. Similarly a research conducted on Bob serves to estimate his split personality; therefore, in the broader context their action could be perceived as schizoanalysis incarnated. Curing Bob, making his personality unified, the same again, is impossible, thus the scientists research the split itself. "Let's start with the set-ground test first. Within the apparently meaningless lines is an object that we would all recognize. You are to tell me what that object is and point to it in the total field" (*A Scanner Darkly* 00:24:36-00:24:45) explains the woman. "In many of those taking substance D a split between right and the left hemisphere of the brain occurs which results within both the percept and the cognitive systems. Although apparently the cognitive continues to function normally" (*A Scanner Darkly* 00:24:46-00:24:58), continues the man. They ask Bob to describe the picture he is seeing. Due to his abuse of Substance D his percept system is damaged, yet his cognition still works. He looks at the card and perceives a sheep, and so does the viewer. However, the scientist claims the picture was supposed to present a dog. The test has only one correct answer. In other words, it would gauge if an individual is able to function properly in his/her actual

reality which consists of objects whose noticeable properties can be confirmed by a group of people, including him/her. Bob is unable to do so, thus his personal, possible, drug-altered world overlaps with the textual actual world. He cannot differentiate real from unreal, and neither can the viewer, as he/she observes this storyworld mostly from Bob's perspective. Furthermore, the concept of split hemispheres is grounded in the viewer's actual reality: "Far from being a fantastical notion of a far-flung plot, the idea that psychosis might result from a disengagement of the hemispheres was subsequently discussed in the scientific literature and is still influential today" (Bell 2006: 3). The viewer's knowledge about the motif of split hemispheres helps to solidify the reasons for Bob's behavior and for what he perceives and how he perceives it.

At his home Bob looks at himself in the mirror and walks around with a gun in his hand. Here the first person narrator speaks up. Bob asks questions in voiceover: "What happened? How'd I get here?" (*A Scanner Darkly* 00:33:14-00:33:21). First person narration enables the viewer to explore Bob's possible worlds. While events in the textual actual world are presented as they are or through surveillance systems, making a distinction between them and Bob's thoughts and memories is required. While he enters, the dark, cluttered living room it abruptly changes into its version from the past: the bright space, occupied by his two daughters and wife. The rotoscoping technique makes the change possible and natural. Therefore the past events, presented as Bob's recollections, differ visually and are narrated by his voiceover as he hits his head on the cabinet while trying to make popcorn:

The pain so unexpected and undeserved had for some reason, cleared away the cobwebs. I realized I didn't hate the cabinet door. I hated my life, my house, my family, my backyard, my power mower. Nothing would ever change. Nothing new could ever be expected. It had to end and it did. Now in a dark world where I dwell ugly things and surprising things and sometimes little wondrous things spill out at me constantly and I can count on nothing. (*A Scanner Darkly* 00:34:02-00:34:55)

This short segment of recollections is yet another possible world, formed and narrated in Bob's mind. Ryan observes that "visual narratives give something to apprehend to the senses, and spectators can imagine that they are directly witnessing events, independently of any mediation" (2022: ch.3). Hence the change between the presented narrative planes has to be indicated in some other way. First-person voiceover accompanied by the visual shift is enough to make the viewer understand that the perspective is altered. Furthermore, the scene suggests that Bob used to be someone else in the past. His current self is only a dark reflection of what he used to be. In this manner the possible world of memories is compared to the textual actual world. Mendoza notes that "in a sense, the entire film is a kind of scramble-suit that formally reflects its content, catching its audience up in a self-reflexive, multi-layered perceptual and affective estrangement that parallels the film characters' own hallucinogenic, paranoid, scrambled states of perception and affective experience" (2014: 246). Past and present worlds both influence Bob's present identity, making it more dualistic and unstable. It is shaped by his experience of the two worlds. The complex experiences not only build the identity of the character but confuse it as well. The sense of estrangement results from the abundance of experience, which eventually functions as a scramble suit, making the characters' true identities scrambled and unrecognizable.

Later there is a lengthy car malfunction scene, including Bob and his friends, that describes how a paranoid mind on drugs is never certain of what is true in the actual world. It ends in Bob's house, where Donna asks a question: "Did I hear you say you were gonna sell the house? Or was that, you know, me dreaming?" (*A Scanner Darkly* 00:46:29-00:46:35). This question underlines the difficulty that characters of this storyworld may have in establishing what is actual, real and what is not. Bob's answer is the following: "Yeah, we're all dreaming" (*A Scanner Darkly* 00:46:38-00:46:40). As it is phrased in one of the scenes that present the

actual side of this storyworld as it is, this answer is received by Donna as a funny comment, yet it is simultaneously streaked with ever-present suspicion.

The possible world induced by the use of Substance D always lurks in the shadows of the psyche of the characters, and it takes over their actual experience. An example of such a takeover is a scene in Bob's house when he and his two friends, James Barris and Ernie Luckman are seated in the living room, smoking marijuana and drinking beer. The subject of their conversation is how to become an impostor, thus it already implies questioning one's stable identity. During the dialogue Bob observes Ernie and James changing into a giant insects. Again rotoscoping technique makes the change appear natural, actual. Anna Powell confirms on the example of *Easy Rider* (1969) that "the time-distorting properties of the drug are convincingly simulated by cinematic techniques" (2007: 71). Furthermore, she quotes that "Deleuze asserts that the camera is able to act 'like a consciousness'" (Powell 2007: 71). Such possibilities are greater when the visuals can be manipulated in the film's post-production. Not only can the flow of time under the influence of drugs be depicted accurately, but the hallucinations themselves might become more immersive. In this particular case Bob still manages to hold on to the actual world. That is not the case with Charles Freck, who at one point decides to commit suicide. Another segment of the film is devoted to his unsuccessful suicide attempt. Powell points out that "Deleuze (in his eponymous essay) presents cinema as both expressing and inducing thought. Like film, the brain itself is a self-reflexive moving image of time, space and motion" (2007: 4). Because of this and thanks to digital technology, the viewer encounters Freck's world of hallucination as the central one, thus it becomes actual. Freck turns on the radio, and the mechanic voiceover broadcast starts to narrate his experience in the third person past tense. This kind of narration is omniscient, therefore it indicates that the situation is only actual for Freck. The voice from the radio even states so directly: "However, he had been burned. Instead of quietly suffocating, Charles Freck began to hallucinate. The next thing he

knew, a creature from between dimension was standing beside his bed, looking down at him disapprovingly” (*A Scanner Darkly* 01:00:01-01:00:14). The third person voiceover has a double function here. It is an natural element of a hallucinated possible world, Freck’s actual one at the time, while it also creates a necessary sense of space between what is actual and what is possible for the viewer.

While at work in a scramble suit, as Fred, Bob gets an assignment to observe his own house through a secret surveillance system. His identity is literally split into two with the use of cyberpunk technology. While the split commences with his identity it later encompasses his whole world. Parallel with the effect of Substance D on his brain, the split of the actual world obscures the properties of actuality. Being Fred he observes Bob and his friends from the third person perspective. Anna Powell also points to Jean Baudrillard: “Since the informatics revolution, he contends, not only have machines become screens, but humans have too, so that ‘the interactivity of men has become the interactivity of screens’ (2007: 179). Surveillance technology captures Bob’s world behind the collection of screens. Fred begins to perceive it as a possible world, one that can be manipulated as if it has become an editable video content. While Fred observes Ernie Luckman choking, he picks up the phone to call for an ambulance, however he never does so. He remains a silent observer, an impotent director. As Powell explicates “the society of the spectacle is also the society of increased electronic surveillance” (2007: 181). In this context she notes Deleuze’s concept of “third eye, replacing the eyes of nature” (Powell 2007: 181). The third eye allows the viewer to perceive more possible worlds, yet it simultaneously sets up a trap of hyperreality, as a possible world might replace the actual one for good. Bob is caught in the middle here. He has two identities and resides in two actual worlds, as Bob and as Fred. Furthermore, the third world, the world of drug-induced hallucinations is creeping up on him. Eventually all of his perspectives align. He hallucinates that the woman he sleeps with literally changes into Donna. Later he rewatches that event on

the recordings at work and sees exactly the same, knowing that it could not have happened in the actual world, yet it did. In another first-person, voiceover utterance Bob acknowledges his disembodiment:

I'm supposed to act like they aren't here. Assuming there's a "they" at all. It may just be my imagination. Whatever it is that's watching it's not human unlike little dark-eyed Donna. It doesn't ever blink. What does a scanner see? Into the head? Down into the heart? Does it see into me, into us? Clearly or darkly? I hope it sees clearly, because I can't any longer see into myself. I see only murk. I hope for everyone's sake the scanners do better. Because if the scanner sees only darkly, the way I do then I am cursed and cursed again. And we'll wind up dead this way knowing very little and getting that little fragment wrong too. (*A Scanner Darkly* 01:14:56-01:16:03)

There is a gap between his perception and cognition that distorts his sense of what is actual. Bob wants to believe that there is some superior perspective that clearly distinguishes what is actual, because he can no longer do so. In his view the fragmented alternative is a pessimistic resolution. Abuse of Substance D and his ambivalent occupation affect his conclusion. Powell writes that "addicts open themselves up to dissolution from which there may be no return" (2007: 65). The dissolution of Bob's state leads to his mental and physical breakdown. Finally he is having a seizure, collapses and is transported by Donna to the New Path rehabilitation center. Donna turns out to be another undercover agent using a scramble suit, actually Bob's superior, named Hank. It is revealed that the plan was all along to get Bob into New Path so he could investigate the institution from the inside, as New Path is suspected of growing blue flowers, from which Substance D is produced. Another agent discusses with Donna why he believes what they did to Bob was necessary:

I mean, I believe God's m.o. is to transmute evil into good and if he's active here, he's doing that now, although our eyes can't perceive it. The whole process is hidden beneath

the surface of our reality will only be revealed later. And even then, the people of the future, our children's children will never truly know this awful time that we have gone through and the losses we took. (*A Scanner Darkly* 01:33:05-01:33:29)

This quote as well as Bob's first person narration reveals that some characters in this storyworld perceive world as a fragmented construct. Some layers of what is actual remain hidden but they believe in their existence; therefore, again asserting the actual world proves to rely on the perspective of the individuals formulating such an assertion in a given space and time. Bob ends up with yet another identity, a new, blank one.

At the end of *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) his name is Bruce and he is sent to a farm owned by the New Path. Although his mind is as that of a child he notices the blue flowers hidden in the cornfield. Then he puts one in his shoe and decides to give it to his friends. An overwhelming amount of perspectives lead to his breakdown. As Bruce he gets a new life, a fresh, singular perspective, just as a child. However, it turns out that his actual world is still influenced by possible worlds embedded deep in his mind, hence some impulse makes him pick up the blue flower. This action is followed by the camera moving away from Bob/Fred/Bruce and showing the enormous cornfield covering the blue flowers plantation. It suggests the possibility of a more positive future but it also emphasizes how complex and multi-layered the actual world can be. Some of its parts are so vast in the terms of space, or placed so far away in time that they share the status of a possible world, only at some unclear point to be encompassed in the actual world, when and where an individual interacts with them.

To conclude: *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) employs digital moviemaking techniques such as rotoscoping technology to create a hyperreal possible world, visible on the screen. Through the lens of Gilles Deleuze's schizoanalysis an abundance of possible worlds within *A Scanner Darkly's* storyworld or textual actual world might be perceived as a collection of complex, creative perspectives that enrich its overall experience. The film holds the power to present

possible worlds of hallucinations as they could be seen; therefore they become actual for the individuals involved. They might be analyzed within a context, but also separately, as the most fantastical worlds could be interpreted using the concept of quantum fiction. Furthermore, this storyworld is fragmented by the cyberpunk technological inventory which consists of scramble suits and elaborate surveillance technology. The latter appears frighteningly similar to the devices operating in the viewer's actual reality. The structure of this storyworld reveals how the boundaries of what is actual may change, expand or shrink. The actual world is one of many worlds. There is no clear answer of how to properly function in such a reality. However, if one would attempt to provide a solution it would be to stay aware of the narrative complexities and try to maintain a reasonable balance between the actual and the possible, even though it proves to be extremely difficult.

Chapter 4

TRANSMETROPOLITAN (1997-2002)

Comics as a narrative medium are capable of presenting a variety of immersive possible worlds. This chapter commences with a discussion on comics as a specific medium with its distinct vocabulary and structural elements. Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* and other theoretical works that elaborate on McCloud's concepts are placed within the context of cognitive narratology, possible worlds theory, and the concept of hyperreality in order to uncover how the recentering process described by Marie-Laure Ryan functions in the case of this particular medium. It shall serve to assess how comics compete with other media when it comes to the production of hyperreal representation of worlds, and to analyze the cyberpunk comic book series *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2002) created by Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson. Apart from the structure of the series, its story and characters, this chapter emphasizes its cyberpunk inventory and discusses how it relates to the present actual world.

Comics are more than just a combination of text and visual art. In *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, Scott McCloud, a comics artist and theoretician, used the very medium to describe it. In this fashion he proved that even theoretical works may present a certain storyworld. He begins by providing a straightforward definition of what comics are: "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud 1994: 9). It is a simple, yet accurate description of the medium that quite often might be associated only with superhero narratives designed for children. Comics serve this purpose among infinite others. McCloud also mentions ancient hieroglyphics (1994: 14) and modern day instructions, such as the ones in planes (1994: 21), as examples of comics. The medium effectively merges written language and visual art in deliberate sequences in order to produce a storyworld. It is fictional compared

to the reader's actual reality thus its perceivable extent is limited by the intentions of both an author and a reader. It depends on an author how much detail a comic book shall contain, and it depends on reader's imagination how far to take their interpretation. Therefore, the simpler the artwork of a comics is the easier the reader identifies with it. Nevertheless, it is not the singular artwork that establishes the storyworld of comics but, as McCloud comments, their deliberate sequence which evokes the sense of flowing time. Whereas an observer can be recentered into a possible world by observing just one picture, a comic book possesses the power to present a visible world existing across a specific time; therefore it resembles the actual reality. A literary text is decoded by the imagination to become a world, while a film is already a dynamic, audiovisual representation of a world. The comics medium stands in between, fusing diegesis with mimesis. McCloud states that "time and space in the world of comics are closely linked" (1994: 107). The reader sees word balloons, which most often present the thoughts of the characters or what they say. Henry John Pratt establishes that "the literary dimension of comics is visually nondiegetic, so it determines not what the characters of the story see, but what they hear" (2009: 108). He adds that "because a comic is silent in actuality, the words it contains are the only way the reader has of accessing sounds that are part of the narrative" (2009: 108). The specific placement of word balloons in one picture implicates the presence of sound which can only progress through time. Hence the sense of flowing time is formed out of the dual capacity of the written text. It is diegetic as a sound for the characters within the storyworld and visually non-diegetic for the reader in the actual world. To be recentered in this case means hearing the text in word balloons, as characters do. Furthermore, at first glance comics might appear to show only a fragment of a world because of their divided, pictorial design. Scott McCloud advocates that in the actual world as well "our sense can only reveal a world that is fragmented and incomplete" (1994: 62). The limitation of our senses entraps us within a specific time and space; yet the rest of our actual world remains present in our minds.

McCloud describes this phenomenon as closure: “In our daily lives, we often commit closure, mentally completing that which is incomplete based on past experience” (1994: 63). Piotr Gąsowski, a Polish comics scholar, mentions Gestalt philosophy and Rudolf Arnheim, who focused on the phenomena called “modal completion” (2016: 126) and amodal completion. These concepts differ depending on which part of the image is obscured.

For the centralized individual the world outside of the physical reach appears complete, even though, as in Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, it could be in a constant superposition. The sense of completeness constitutes both the actual world and any kind of storyworld, however abstract it might be. The blanks are filled by the individual’s mimetic storage, cognitive schema or simply accumulated knowledge. When the reader is recentered into a storyworld it becomes actual for the time of its experiencing. Marie-Laure Ryan explicates that a text shows its characters directly as real, not as fictional compared to the reader’s actual reality: “According to the story Hamlet is not a fictional character but a regular human being. He is not created by an author but born out of a father and mother. And since regular human beings are ontologically complete, one must assume that Hamlet is also complete, at least within the story” (2022: 83). A written text is conveyed into the world image through the imagination, backed by learnt schema. Words are in this manner decoded into a storyworld while closure might also work on non-existent passages of the text. In a film closure happens for what remains invisible for the viewer. The same goes for the comics medium; however, in comics the invisible space has its own representation. It is termed the gutter, which is an empty space between panels on a page. McCloud comments that closure allows the gutters to link the panels and “mentally construct a continuous, unified reality” (1994: 67). In the comics medium the reader fills in the actual blanks with his/her own observations, based on what happened on the previous panel. Neil Cohn, turns to cognitive science to explain this phenomenon:

Comprehenders access semantic information about objects and events in images. A narrative grammar assigns images categorical roles and groups them into hierarchic constituents so that semantic information can be organized sequentially and construct a coherent situation model. While the narrative grammar eventually fades from memory, a situation model shifts from working memory to episodic long-term memory as the meaning of a visual narrative is retained into the future. In online processing, both semantics and narrative use forward and backward-looking mechanisms in an iterative cycle of prediction and updating in the ongoing processing of sequential images. (2019: 377).

Applying the personal experience and narrative structure of a comic book the reader transforms still, sequential images with their accompanying text into a world image, repeatedly filling in the empty spaces between them. It can be compared to the observation of a superposition, involuntarily choosing what is actual and overwriting the world image with its hyperreal version formulated through the imagination. While experiencing a possible world the human mind strives for a complete relocation of focus, a complete immersion. Hyperreal representations of possible worlds are alluring in an obvious, nuanced manner. However, if the mind has insufficient data about something, it commits to closure, creating an individual hyperreal experience, based on something inherently simple, such as a cartoon. McCloud argues that “the cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled... an empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel into another realm” (1994: 36). The simpler the cartoon face is depicted the easier it is to identify with. The more complex depictions are altered by the author's intentions, providing more specific visual characteristics. Nevertheless, a visible face remains an invitation to a possible world. It offers to be a focalized vessel for a traveler from the actual one. In Gibson's *Neuromancer* it belonged to Case, and it was projected by the reader's imagination and his/her interpretation of the literary text. In *A Scanner Darkly* it was

Bob Arctor's visible yet blurred face, presented on the screen. In *Transmetropolitan* the face of the recentering vessel is perceivable as well and it belongs to Spider Jerusalem, a gonzo-journalist of the cyberpunk world, mediated through comics.

Transmetropolitan, published from 1997 to 2002, is one of the most famous cyberpunk comics, along Masamune Shirow's *Ghost in the Shell* (1991) and Frank Miller's and Geof Darrow's *Hard Boiled* (1990). Some might claim that *Transmetropolitan* should be described as postcyberpunk, because it further develops cyberpunk notions:

We may think of Case's "no shit" response in *Neuromancer*'s revelation of the new post Singularity AI as emblematic in this regard. It has been later post-cyberpunk (and by this I not only mean the temporal but also the general dissemination of cyberpunk themes as the cultural dominant) that has often been able to better focus narratives around these novums. (O'Connel 2020: 287)

Postcyberpunk is supposed to take classic cyberpunk themes a step further, beyond its naïve, destructive, dystopian premises. Adding the prefix "post" functions in a hyperreal manner, changing an already existing genre into a more realistic and more detailed one. With postcyberpunk the original cyberpunk properties do not perish. They evolve because cyberpunk's core theme, the collision of two extremes, does not lead to a dead end outcome. Within this kind of reality there is space for the complex growth of narratives and their characters. An example is the actual reality, saturated with technological novums, the paranoid storyworld under surveillance of Richard Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly*, and also *Transmetropolitan*'s storyworld polarized by brutal political forces.

Transmetropolitan's storyworld spans across sixty issues published from 1997 to 2002. Comics can be published in the form of graphic novels, which are complete volumes telling a finished story. However, it has been more common to publish comics as a series. This way the

comics creators are able to keep expanding their storyworlds, adding new narrative elements, telling additional stories in a longer time period. Hence, at first glance it appears as a practice that strips away the overall coherency of the particular narrative experience. There is always such a threat, yet simultaneously publishing a story as a long-running series provides a space to present further details of the storyworld. In this fashion the *Transmetropolitan* series begins with its so-called first year, issues from one to thirteen, which consists of a collection of short stories set in its storyworld. Each story has its own beginning and end; yet as a whole collection they serve as pieces of a complex transition in a recentering process. They are full of information about the storyworld's aesthetics, its locations and characters. The first one, entitled *The Summer of the Year*, introduces the reader to Spider Jerusalem, the main character, the focalized protagonist, the centralized individual and the recentering vessel. Karin Kukkonen underlines that "characters are storyworld participants, and different things in the storyworld can mean different things to them. When we draw inferences, we try to relate these to characters and their intentions. These processes create a storyworld peopled with characters with different intentions, attitudes, and convictions" (2013: 24). When recentering is successful the reader perceives characters as living beings. If they are human-like characters the reader has to be acquainted with them. The comic book consists of a cover that often features the main character. The first issue of *Transmetropolitan* includes a cover that discloses Spider Jerusalem standing in an immensely cluttered room, smoking a cigarette, looking directly at the reader. Behind him, outside the window, there is a vibrant depiction of a filthy city covered by an abundance of advertisement. Jerusalem's pose implies a blatant invitation, as if he was saying: This is my world and it is disgusting. Step right in.

The first story, *The Summer of the Year* opens with the picture of a house covered in snow and two square word balloons, that say: "Up a goddamn mountain: So that ignorant, thick-lipped, evil whorehopping editor phones me up and says," (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002).

The picture includes realistic colors, thus the sky in high mountains is whitish, bright, and the clouds are thick and greyish. McCloud observes that “color comics will always seem more ‘real’ at first glance” (1994: 192). Realistic representation suggests that the world the reader is entering color-wise resembles actual reality, so the recentering is more fluent. Then there is also a differently shaped, curved word balloon, suggesting an angry utterance made by someone or something inside the house: “Does the word contract mean anything to you Jerusalem?” (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). Its specific shape is associated by an experienced comics reader with a diegetic sound made within the textual actual reality. It is visibly different from the previous square one, which appears to be uttered from behind the scenes. Only the second panel reveals that the text in square word balloons is a narration delivered by Spider Jerusalem himself. He is the first person narrator, so his message is non-diegetic sound that only he and the reader can hear. It is a fragment of the textual possible world. The panel depicts an image of a crazed man screaming into a telephone: “Contract? You will never get a city hitman up the mountain to me – you bastards die if there’s an actual oxygen in the air” (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). This message is encompassed within a regular word balloon, indicating that it is a diegetic sound, made within the textual actual world. Moreover, the panel includes another square word balloon that states: “I was having a mildly paranoid day, mostly due to the fact that the mad priest lady from over the river had taken to nailing weasels to my front door again” (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). The reader is able to mentally connect the two word balloons that represent messages existing on two separate narrative levels, diegetic and non-diegetic. Thus the two worlds, the textual actual world and the textual possible world are invisibly sewed together. They remain separate, yet the reader understands that they overlap and she/he uses the mimetic toolkit or learnt schema to distinguish them and to identify the speaker.

Spider Jerusalem is shown as a hairy, tattooed human being, residing in a mountain cabin. As the reader is mentally prepared to distinguish the messages in word balloons and their

source, she/he is also competent to facilitate the imaginary existence of Jerusalem's world through the sense of closure: "Once the principle of closure is moved to panel-to-panel transitions, there is the tacit assumption that we have the same characters and locations at a slightly later point in time but we do not run an inner film of how they got there" (Kukkonen 2013: 11). In the beginning of *The Summer of the Year* the gutters between the panels are curvy and colorful, suggesting that the mental construct formed by the reader should be filled with strong emotions and vivid colors. Through filling in the gutters, assuming the circle is whole even though we only see its elements "we construct a mental model of the characters, the relations between them and the events that affect them. This mental model is the basis for the storyworld" (Kukkonen 2013: 12). However, *Transmetropolitan's* storyworld is not only its protagonist Spider Jerusalem and his "diegetic storytelling" (Ryan 2022: 118) made possible by the author's use of square word balloons. The comics medium is a symbiosis of text and image, the image providing the storyworld with a visible background mimetically. Therefore, the next panel visualizes the interior of Spider Jerusalem's mountain recluse. It is a filthy room, with writings on the wall. Jerusalem is sitting in the center, naked, with a phone and a bottle of alcohol in his hands. The broader perspective puts the character in a context. The *mis en page* in comics is salient because the reader's attention "fluctuates between a vague and general impression of the entire page and its composition and the specific gestalt of the event presented in a particular panel. This movement between background and foreground, between the part and the whole, create a dynamic reading experience" (Kukkonen 2013: 19). The first page of *The Summer of the Year* presents panels which go back and forth, showing the background aesthetics of the storyworld and close-ups of its centralized individual. In this fashion the reader is successfully introduced to both.

Spider Jerusalem stumbles around his cabin, talking to his editor on the phone and narrating simultaneously. The gutters and panels become more stable and simple as Jerusalem

looks out the window and decides to go back to the City. At first he looks as a hermit or even as a native tribesman. Upon making a decision to go back to civilization he puts on some clothes, starting to resemble a homeless man. The next page shows him packing up his car and includes the title of the story. The image also consists of many superfluous details, such as a gun falling out of the trunk or a bumper sticker saying: “Jesus is my best friend but he won’t loan me money” (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). Clothes and worthless items pave the way for the passage from the wilderness to civilization. Along the transition the reader gets to know Spider Jerusalem better. At the beginning he narrates the story in the past tense, as if he was writing an article. There is a point to it because of who he is: “Journalists do not cry. And I am a fucking journalist. Again” (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). Hence the nature of the textual possible world, indicated by Spider’s unreliable narration, remains uncertain. It is unclear whether he actually writes it as an article or if it is only a voice in his head. This uncertainty relates to the kind of journalism Spider Jerusalem does. He is a model gonzo journalist.

Knowledge about gonzo journalism and its central figure helps in understanding who Spider Jerusalem is. It facilitates an intertextual reading of *Transmetropolitan*, expanding the reader’s world constructing competence. The main figure associated with gonzo journalism is Hunter S. Thompson. Peter Richardson states that “Thompson considered himself a novelist and modeled himself on Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Faulkner. Whenever necessary, he shrugged off journalism’s protocols to supercharge his prose” (2016: 56). Thompson wrote journalist texts as if they were fictional and as if he was their protagonist. Richardson cites the following words by Hunter S. Thompson: “Fiction is a bridge to truth that journalism can’t reach” (2016: 56). Thompson believed that objective journalism is not an acceptable option and each piece of news is influenced by multiple factors. Thus he took the opposite direction and tried to make his journalist reports as subjective as possible. The storyworlds he formed in this fashion are in result a productive mix of fact and fiction. He embraced the ephemeral,

ambiguous aspect of journalist reports, supercharging them with his own perspective, his own possible world, as a fictional protagonist narrating a story in first person perspective might have done. In his notable work *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* Thompson wrote: “Maybe it meant something. Maybe not, in the long run... but no explanation, no mix of words or music or memories can touch that sense of knowing that you were there and alive in that corner of time and the world. Whatever it meant...” (2005: 66-67). This quote implies that only being in the center of a storyworld makes its experience real and unique. From another perspective the proper use of a medium can bring its user closer to such an authenticity. Also, a specific medium might convey more than just the bare facts. From the perspective of Hunter S. Thompson and gonzo journalism the subjectivity of a report makes it more complex, honest and, what is the most important, more truthful.

Ashlee Nelson notes that Spider Jerusalem can be viewed as “an embodiment of Thompson as well as his peculiar professional approach as a Gonzo journalist” (2018: 305). He has to return from the mountains to the city in order to once again become actively involved in the narrative. Descending from the remote location reflects moving inward, into the storyworld. As he gets closer to the city he states: “We’re inside the city’s communication sphere. That noise behind my voice is the sound of my professional apparatus firing up...” (Ellis 1997-2002). The next panel focuses on the pile of trash on the back seat. It shows a box full of colorful magazines and radios. The image is accompanied by a couple of curvy word balloons that stand for the informational noise coming from the radio. All the news and adds are incoherent and hectic. They foreshadow the inventory of the world that both Spider Jerusalem and the reader are entering. Spider’s response is the following: “This goddamn noise medicine is required. ;hlug;” (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). It is contained within the word balloon which goes beyond the panel, indicating that it comes from the front seat of the car. It includes onomatopoeia that allows the reader to hear Spider drinking.

Next the gonzo journalist reaches a tollgate that leads to the city and encounters the second inhabitant of this storyworld. The encounter is spread out on four panels. Two of them present the first person perspective of Spider in his car and the other two the first person perspective of the man working in the tollbooth. David M. Higgins and Matthew Iung note that *Transmetropolitan* "series offers an especially cynical view of transhumanism, suggesting that any optimism surrounding progressive possibilities for technological transcendence will always be undermined by such human failings as greed, shortsightedness, and insensitivity" (2020: 96). This is already visible in the man's appearance and facial expression. He is tired looking and he has some shady implants that seem to cause an infection in his neck. The first person perspectives and thin gutters create a sense of directness in the reader, placing him/her in the position of the speaker. As he reaches for money Spider comments the man: "Working this tollbooth all week, pissing in a whisky bottle and weakly jerking off over the radio porn that aerial picks up... must be a tough life. But you really are everything I moved to the mountain to escape from. A worthless scrap of frogshit with a pulse and a bit of authority" (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). The suggestive imagery, the first person perspective and Spider's comment introduces the reader to the cyberpunk character inventory of *Transmetropolitan*. If this is who a low-profile tollbooth worker is in this storyworld then the reader might get a good idea of how the rest of its inhabitants shall behave.

The background City is a multilayered, dazzling structure of high buildings covered by an abundance of advertisement. The couple of larger panels show Spider's car in the center, surrounded by stacked ads, signs of various sort, saying: "Free transcient special, Still sober? New Disc Dirty Rain CFC, Funeral Home Bath In Stores November 13th, Stereo implants, etc." (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). They represent a hyperbolic, futuristic, hyper-consumerist, ultra-capitalist society. Its members are pedestrians in stagnation, over-dressed and overloaded with cybernetic, transhuman equipment. When Spider is stuck in traffic he leaves his car and

proceeds by foot. He therefore becomes one with the City, and the next few panels show only stills from its streets, with Spider's words in square, non-diegetic word balloons: "The city never allowed itself to decay or degrade. It's wildly, intensely growing. It's a loud, bright, stinking mess. It takes strength from its thousands of cultures, and the thousands more that grow anew each day" (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). Spider's inner comments, imposing his textual possible world upon the juxtaposing, detailed textual actual world of the City, supplies it with a context, helping the reader understand the unfamiliar.

Spider Jerusalem storms the headquarters of the newspaper to speak with his editor. The panels on the pages overlap with each other, creating in the reader the sense of tension. Jerusalem throws around grenades causing the spreading of smoke. Due to cognitive capacities and schema developed by the reader he/she is able to notice movement in a still picture. Piotr Gąsowski refers to cognitivists Paul Thagard and Martha J. Farah in order to underline that perception and imagination are both part of a complex system and that they are in a similar fashion "an interpretation of incoming information, an attempt to understand what is recorded by senses" (2016: 51). Using what was perceived in the actual world enables a person to be properly recentered to the possible world of *Transmetropolitan*. Scott McCloud mentions various kinds of movement representations in comics, among which are "multiple images" (1994: 112) and "streaking" (1994: 112). Streaking is visible when Jerusalem enters the editors office and an experienced reader may associate it with sudden action. Then the gonzo journalist faces his editor, Mitchell Royce. If there were no pictures Jerusalem's conversation with Royce, "could easily read as if it were taken from one of the Thompson's works of Gonzo journalism" (Nelson 2018: 306).

Since knowledge from the actual world aids in understanding the characters it is necessary to make a clear distinction between Spider Jerusalem and Hunter S. Thompson, especially because at one point of the *The Summer of the Year* Jerusalem even starts to resemble

Thompson physically. Marie-Laure Ryan states that “according to PW theory, possible worlds may be located at variable distances from the real world, and their inventory of individual characters may overlap to some extent with the inventory of the real world” (2022: 47). She uses the example of the Napoleon of *War and Peace* who “is not, technically, the Napoleon of the real world but the real Napoleon is linked to the Napoleons of other possible worlds through counterpart relations” (2022: 48). In the same manner the characteristics of Spider Jerusalem correspond to Hunter S. Thompson’s; however, their names and storyworlds differ. Thompson’s writings cover the period from 1960s to the early 2000s and are set in the actual world of the past while Jerusalem operates in a possible, cyberpunk city. They both match their storyworlds. To further inspect Spider’s storyworld I will discuss its inventory and the way Jerusalem interacts with it.

In his new, cheap flat Jerusalem talks with a machine which produces clothes. It has a consciousness and it behaves oddly. Jerusalem pulls a small object from inside it and states the following: “I know what this is. This is a hallucinogen simulator for live machinery isn’t it? My household appliance is on drugs. Horrible” (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). This is a world where even a household appliance is a conscious being and can administer drugs. It is a subversive, ironic take on a posthuman trope. Jerusalem talks with it and is also able to command his TV set to speak. When he turns it on one of the panels on the page visualizes what is happening on the screen. All panels overlap, creating a sense of immediacy saturated with information, multiplied by many word balloons that stand for diegetic sounds coming from the TV as Spider’s workspace is visible in the background. Through the TV set Spider can expand his knowledge about his actual world. This medium allows him to transcend the physical boundaries. Therefore a regular TV set proves to be one of the pivotal items of cyberpunk inventory. The medium presents a narrative set in a different parts of the city, providing a virtual connection between what is physical, yet separated by space and time.

Jerusalem perceives the ongoing narrative and as a gonzo journalist he chooses to get involved in it. N. Katherine Hayles establishes that through informational technologies “materiality and immateriality are joined in a complex tension that is a source of exultation and strong anxiety” (1999: 43). Because of the immateriality of the TV news Spider Jerusalem reaches the material piece of his actual world and later legitimizes it with his own presence and interference. Hayles concludes that “information, like humanity, cannot exist apart from the embodiment that brings it into being as a material entity in the world; and embodiment is always instantiated, local, and specific” (1999: 49). The gonzo journalist is a figure that defines this statement. Jerusalem is a physical agent that through his presence materializes the storyworld around him. In the final page of *The Summer of the Year* he walks through the City. His ultimate message is again presented in square word balloons that include first person narration:

I hear kodo drumming from the Japanese island a few blocks south: the sound of a village gathering its people home for the night. Laughter up the street, as nightclub gates melt open. The test of a city cigarette, smooth and fat. Angels 8 isn't far. A brief clutter of gunfire. The sound of a couple having sex that they have waited the whole day for. The jump of caffeine in my fingers, the clacker of intelligence enhancers in my head. There'll be a taxi for me at the end of the street, because that's just the way things are. City under my feet. Home again. (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002)

Jerusalem's inner comment, his personal stance expresses the physicality of his surroundings. An immaterial, individual perspective combined with a material setting becomes a total experience of the storyworld for Jerusalem, as well as for the comics reader who is recentered into his storyworld, the dense, loud, smelly cyberpunk city.

The following few stories forming the first year of the series include more significant pieces of inventory as well as inhabitants of this storyworld. In the story *Up On the Roof* Jerusalem reports the clash between Transients and a police squad. Transients are humans who

want to become aliens by transforming their bodies. Transients are met with prejudice, especially when their leader Fred Christ wants to establish their separate community in one of the City's districts, Angel 8. Lars Schmeink observes that cyberpunk "inserts itself into posthuman discourse by providing a science-fictional imaginary for both cyborg-enhanced and genetically engineered humanity and the social implications both technologies bring with them" (2016: 21). Transients are an example of genetically altered humans that face society's backlash. In his critical essay on the social model of disability in *Transmetropolitan*, Richard Gibson aims to "use the transient movement as a proxy for those with a form of impairment to better illustrate the disabling effect society can inflict on those who inhabit an atypical body construct" (2018: 18). The scholar discusses how the Transients minority is excluded within *Transmetropolitan's* storyworld and how the comics series discusses "disability and impairment" (Gibson 2018: 19). Transients as an element of this storyworld's inventory combine the transhuman trope of body transformation with "the way in which systematic and social prejudices and structures can act in a disabling manner against those who do not necessarily have an impairment but still differ drastically from what we would classically consider the biological statistical norm" (Gibson 2018: 19). To reach the truth about the riot which occurred between the Transients and the police Spider Jerusalem climbs onto the roof of a nearby club and states: "Right. As I was saying. Journalism is just a gun. It's only got one bullet in it, but if you aim right, that's all you need. Aim it right and you can blow a kneecap of the world..." (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). He reports the events below as they are happening. His report is presented in specific word balloons which resemble pieces of a newspaper article; thus it is distinguishable from his first person narration and the diegetic word balloons that include voices of the characters. In a way Jerusalem refines the textual actual world, using his subjective insight, a journalistic bullet as he puts it, into a new narrative representing its own possible world. The possible world of a gonzo journalist report might include truth properties that the textual actual world lacks. It is a

direct account of a human being experiencing a chaotic moment. The comics medium has capacity to show a visual event fused with its narrative. Moreover, the textual actual reality and the possible world of Spider's report clash. The latter influences the former. The suggestiveness of Jerusalem's narration is so effective that the responsible politicians are forced to withdraw the police squad. The journalist text and the cyberpunk, digital medium which disseminated it changed the textual actual world, overwriting its elements with new data. Baudrillard claims that "the media and the official news service are only there to maintain the illusion of an actuality, of the reality of the stakes, of the objectivity of facts" (1994: 27). In this context an independent report functions as a breach in the simulation, an evocation of truth. However, it is still an illusion because such a report can exist only in opposition to the preexisting order. A rebellion requires an enemy that it does not annihilate but transforms into a new order of simulation. The dynamics of the individual, the media and the political powers in *Transmetropolitan*, exemplify that a physical event, which is narrated and later disseminated by digital media, merges the actual world with possible worlds, resulting in a hyperreality – an actual world image that has replaced its previous version.

Hyperreality, therefore, is simultaneously a total and ephemeral phenomenon in a process of constant becoming. The actual world can be overwritten by overlapping possible worlds, and continue to exist in its new version without notice. The inhabitants of the actual world are unable to overcome it, although they might transform it, assimilating the possible world. While reporting on the roof Spider Jerusalem assumes a central role in this process. He is a physical individual who creates a narrative that instantly changes the textual actual world. The immaterial report stops the riot. Jerusalem, however, is physical in his textual actual world and eventually is violently beaten by the police in retaliation. The story *Up On the Roof* ends with a couple of panels that present a group of police officers attacking Spider. Some of the scenes are presented from the first person perspective, which allows the reader to experience

the brutal dynamic of the situation. Spider is left in a pool of blood, laughing. This image emphasizes the fact that he is a character grounded in his textual actual world which is made out of literal flesh. He forms a narrative up on the roof and then experiences it down on the ground level.

Transmetropolitan's storyworld is filled with physical bodies. It is a cyberpunk world, thus the body is emphasized through a contrast with technology. The female body in this case is hypersexualized. In *Up On the Roof* Spider meets his first assistant Channon Yarrow who is a stripper, "another (Yelena) is a daughter-figure with whom he has a one-night stand, and Spider knowingly allows yet another assistant (Indira Ataturk) to be drugged into participating in a public orgy, which results in her becoming the central figure in a popular porn video called 'Kali in Heat'" (Higgins and Iung 2020: 96). The women in this world are often commodities, and that defines the hyper-consumerism society that inhabits the City. Higgins and Iung rightfully note that "Spider is a flawed character, but the audience is invited to find him charming because he is less flawed than the villains he's fighting against. The misogyny and fetishization of women, in this manner, is therefore minimized in deference to other supposedly more serious problems, which is a problem in itself" (2020: 96). Their statement comments on Spider as a character as well as warning the reader in the actual world of the overshadowed problem. In this aspect Jerusalem is a synecdoche of a misogynistic society, that grew from a hyper-consumer culture.

The collision of body and spirit is a recurring theme in *Transmetropolitan's* storyworld and in the cyberpunk genre in general: "At the heart of cyberpunk fiction is the radical breaking up of dichotomies and the destabilizing of boundaries: machine/human, nature/culture, male/female, high culture/ low culture, body/mind" (Schmeink 2016: 21). In the story *Boyfriend Is a Virus* Spider Jerusalem says "You could download a mind from out of —let's face it— eminently crappy, badly designed human body and into seriously useful and functionally

immortal artificial form” (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). The gonzo journalist explains to his assistant Channon how in this storyworld humans are able to transport their consciousness from the body to any other kind of vessel, or even become conscious spirits. He makes reference to Hans Moravec, a scholar who exists in the actual world as well as in *Transmetropolitan*’s storyworld in terms of counterpart relations. N. Katherine Hayles notes that “Moravec argues that the age of carbon-based life is drawing to a close. Humans are about to be replaced by intelligent machines as the dominant life-form on the planet” (1999: 235). Such a futurist concept is yet to be fulfilled in the actual reality but in *Transmetropolitan* it has already been actualized. Hayles also adds that Moravec “equates consciousness with human subjectivity” (1999: 238) and presents the alternative in the form of Artificial Life (AL), in opposition to Artificial Intelligence (AI):

Whereas AI envisions cognition as the operation of logic, AL sees cognition as the operation of nervous systems; AI starts with human-level cognition, AL with insect- or animal-level cognition; in AI, cognition is constructed as if independent of perception, whereas in AL it is integrated with sensory/motor experiences. (Hayles 1999: 238)

Forming an artificial consciousness out of the basic operations of the nervous system would be more responsible than relying strictly on logic, which itself is derived from complex cognitive systems.

Spider and Channon face the results of Moravec’s concepts brought to life. They encounter an intelligent horse that brings them to the download suites where human consciousness is being downloaded. In the building they talk with Tico, Spider’s acquaintance who does not have a body. As Channon says Tico looks as “a pile of dust” (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). Tico explains what he is in the next panels: “I’m a billion of these. Foglets. Small enough to move atoms around” (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). In one panel Tico is a glowing (the elements of his depiction suggest it cognitively), pink mist while in the next one he

materializes into a white flower, proving his abilities. The reader is able to imagine the transformation through modal completion, the sense of closure. At first downloading human consciousness appears to be a step in the right direction. Later, however, Channon observes how her boyfriend Ziang undergoes such a procedure, which is coherently presented by the combination of suggestive imaging and Tico's diegetic commentary. Eventually Ziang also becomes a pink mist starting to interact with yet another immaterial being inside the downloading chamber. Tico explains that the two clouds are having sex and Channon storms out of the building, feeling betrayed. Through the process of downloading consciousness Ziang separated himself from the physical world where his girlfriend Channon remained. In the last panels of *Boyfriend is Virus* Spider runs after his assistant, showing that they both share the same physical, human status. The final picture presents the City's landscape, and emphasizes that what the reader just witnessed is a fragment of this storyworld.

In the story *Another Cold Morning* Spider Jerusalem writes an article about a woman, Mary, who after death was cryogenically suspended. The storytelling consists of Spider's third person narration in square word balloons and pictures that present Mary. For Mary a jump in time marks the change of her actual world. When she finally gets a new body and steps out to witness her new world she is overwhelmed. The form of the panels that depict what she sees are suitably shattered and incoherent. They include a collage of drastic images that visualize the City as it is – a brutal, dirty, overpopulated human construct. Mary is one of the Revivals, the group of people who are brought back into the new bodies and are unable to adjust to the new reality. Jerusalem writes that such people are full of stories that “make us great” (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). However, stories of the past are a kind of possible worlds, sealed within the human memory. The textual actual world neither has a place for Mary, nor for her past. At the end of the story Jerusalem interacts with the subject of his article by kissing her on the forehead. Again the gonzo journalist proves to be a figure capable of merging the actual world

with the possible world of a journalist account. The final pages of *Another Cold Morning* depict Jerusalem leaving his typewriter. Now the panels do not include text, only images of Spider smoking and walking to the balcony. They focus on the character's back, the balcony and the City. Piotr Gąsowski discusses Scott McCloud's take on "aspect to aspect" (2016: 140) transition between panels and comments that it serves "slowing down the pace of the reading and creating a specific mood" (Gąsowski 2016: 141). The inclusion of the silent scenes of Spider Jerusalem smoking a cigarette on his balcony provides enough time to contemplate Mary's tragic life, and it places it in the context of the storyworld – the extensive city.

The main storyline of *Transmetropolitan* comics series begins in the second year of Spider's adventures and it concerns the political scene. It is quite unusual for the classic cyberpunk narrative to deal with the political background of a storyworld. As Andrew M. Butler observes, early cyberpunk films such as *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) based on William Gibson's short story "represent the world simplistically, demonizing corporate philosophy and valorizing the individual, creating a binary of Bad corporations and Good hacker kids" (2020: 124). In this aspect *Transmetropolitan* enriches classic cyberpunk notions, adding the political context; thus it may be assessed as postcyberpunk. Postcyberpunk derives from cyberpunk and as a genre does not stand on its own without referring to its predecessor. As a result it reveals that cyberpunk storyworlds can become more complex, revolving around more than just one binary opposition. In *Transmetropolitan* Spider Jerusalem gets involved in the presidential election. He writes about both candidates, the resident conservative president Dean Heller "The Beast", and his opponent Garry Callahan "The Smiler". In his article Nicolas Labarre discusses the spike of *Transmetropolitan*'s popularity during 2016's U.S presidential election, among other aspects looking "at the specific parallels with Donald Trump's trajectory as a candidate then a president" (2019: 433). Labarre also enlists the similarities between the campaigns of Richard

Nixon and George McGovern, Hunter S. Thompson's attitude towards them, and the storyworld of *Transmetropolitan*:

Jerusalem's trajectory is similar: he embraces a liberal newcomer, Gary Callahan, in the primaries pitting him against a brutal populist candidate, Dean Heller, then calls for him to defeat the incumbent, 'The Beast', a stand-in for Nixon. However, Callahan, the 'Smiler', turns out to be devoid of scruples and even more dangerous than 'The Beast'. (2019: 434)

Labarre indicates that the characters of *Transmetropolitan* could be analyzed in comparison to political figures who populated the actual world in the 1970s as well as others in the year 2016. He concludes that *Transmetropolitan* "employed a strategy of exaggeration and satire, which provided many parallels with Donald Trump's own habit of making exaggerated claims" (2019: 442). There are similarities between the three presidential races mentioned (Nixon and McGovern, The Beast and The Smiler, Trump and Clinton) while from the point of view of the sample reader each one is contained in a recorded narrative and presented through a certain media or medium. As observed in the example of *Up On the Roof*, comics medium makes it possible to depict the merging of a narrative with its physical counterpart, due to its structural affordances. On the pages of *Transmetropolitan* Spider Jerusalem interacts not only with the environment, a particular event or a larger social construct, but with those specific characters wielding power to shape it as well.

In part five of the story *The New Scum* he faces The Smiler who directly admits to arranging his campaign manager's, Vita Severn's murder. The meeting is encompassed within square panels, coherently laid out on the pages. Distinct panels focus on the close-ups of Callahan's face. Piotr Gąsowski refers to the film scholar David Bordwell when he discusses interpretation of a comics frame: "The context of the whole work should play the deciding role in the process of the interpretation" (2016: 107). Gary Callahan is the face of the malignant

political system that manipulates the storyworld. His nickname 'The Smiler' comes from his facial expression that hardly ever changes in public. By contrast, during his face off with Spider Jerusalem there are plenty emotions visible on his face that the reader can perceive while shifting from panel to panel. In the panel where he and Jerusalem stand eye to eye The Smiler states: "I'm going to have you Jerusalem. I'm going to destroy you" (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). Callahan's face is twisted with rage and there is visible spit coming from his mouth. The threat was not recorded and The Smiler sums up the meeting in two sentences, again smiling frantically: "We didn't say anything. We were never here" (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). The conversation was not mediated in any way; thus its circumstances are very much limited by time and space. It occurred between three people (the journalist, the presidential candidate and his complicit assistant) and without mediation its content will remain obscured. Here the close-ups in the context of the whole *Transmetropolitan* storyworld serve to underline the intimacy of the particular, coherent, unmediated human encounter. The three men have the power to change the storyworld through immaterial means; nevertheless they are physical beings. Their encounter can be perceived as a small, cut off world within a storyworld. Just as Callahan said their conversation might have never taken place.

In the final part of *The New Scum* story Spider reacts to The Smiler's victory. He and his two female assistants step out of the building and throw grenades into the air. Some panels do not include any word balloons. As David A. Berona notes, in wordless comics "the time the reader must spend to interpret the pictorial information and determine its role in the narrative increases" (2001 :38). At first, the panels depict Spider standing alone in the dark street, observing the crowd cheering for Callahan's success, pondering the use of grenades he has in his hands. The reader is recentered into Jerusalem and he/she tries to interpret his state of mind only from the still pictures. Eventually the silence is broken and Spider screams: "Me against the whole fucking world!" (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). He declares war against the system

that has the face of The Smiler. Grenade explosions depicted on the whole-page, final panel of this story are symbolic as they imply the fracture made in the tissue of the unmediated, personal piece of the world or in an obscured piece of the narrative. Spider Jerusalem as a gonzo journalist has the means to make an impact on the whole storyworld so strongly saturated with media inventory, and the gesture of throwing grenades is a clear statement that he intends to use them.

While Jerusalem's articles influence the storyworld throughout the entire series, his image is also employed as a reusable commodity because he is an active public figure; he is turned into a fictional character, placed and exploited in the textual possible worlds generated by the media. The story *Nobody Loves Me* presents three distinct kinds of worlds within *Transmetropolitan's* storyworld. The first one is the textual actual world that includes Spider watching television, and his two assistants. The second kind encompasses the narratives viewed on the television, and the third one shows Spider's drug hallucinations. Christian Hviid Mortensen describes them as follows:

When Spider's fame is peaking, we witness his media personality multiply successively when he is first turned into a cartoon character, then the protagonist of a (meta-) fictional TV drama series starring a more stereotypical masculine "actor" as Spider, and finally a porn star. Spider realizes he is no longer a threat to the establishment but has become part of the game. He turns to drugs and in his hallucinations we see his deep-seated fear of not reaching his audience. (2018: 32)

As it appears Spider is entangled in a media web distorting his reality. In his article Mortensen applies Baudrillard's and McLuhan's concepts to conclude that "as an anti-environment, *Transmetropolitan* shows media technology is not to blame for our appropriation of the selfsame media technology" (2018: 33). The scholar compares the fictional cyberpunk world with the actual one because they both include socially valuable insights. Here it is possible to

observe the workings of media convergence in a hyper-consumer society. Media theorist Henry Jenkins writes that by convergence he means “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they wanted” (2006: 2). In *Transmetropolitan* media convergence can be noticed on the example of the figure of Spider Jerusalem and his audience. In the public space he exists as a popular, scandalous author with his specific traits. Due to his fame society demands more of him; people want to consume his image through other media. Hence various top-down created television shows with multiple versions of Spider begin to appear. The hyperreality of this event is that the TV shows might replace the original image of the gonzo journalist in the public eye.

There is a cartoon, a TV drama and a porn film. In the comics each one is shown through separate panels, stylized to resemble TV screen’s light, and each one of them consists of a textual possible world. One of the panels of the porn film even includes the text message that states: “This is a work of fiction not intended to represent anyone living, dead, or writing a weekly column for a newspaper” (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). Ellis and Robertson play with the idea of how appealing fictional creations are received by public opinion. In a mimetic manner it is more convenient to consume fiction which has familiar elements from the receiver’s actual world.

Eventually *Nobody Loves Me* also depicts the textual possible worlds of Spider’s hallucinations. He takes drugs because he cannot stand how his image is exploited. The first hallucination tells a story on its own and is built from coherent square panels with a white space between them. The second one is Spider’s nightmare in a hellish setting. It is adequately saturated with shades of red, orange and black, which cover both panels and the spaces between. All of the three worlds shown in this story are influenced by the media inventory of

Transmetropolitan's storyworld. The comics medium proves its ability to grant each one a fair, cohesive representation, whether they are in a macro or microscale in relation to the storyworld.

On one side there are the microscale worlds of Spider's hallucinations. They are intimate and personal. On the other side there is the storyworld, the totality. Somewhere between them there are other textual possible worlds created by the media, and in particular, unmediated physical encounters. They are all interconnected, and *Transmetropolitan's* story dynamic works across all their connections. On the macroscale president Callahan leaves the City to be destroyed by a humongous storm. He does it so that some evidence incriminating him might be destroyed. The comics medium is able to present the ensuing destruction using "scene-to-scene" (McCloud 1994: 71) and other commonly used transitions mentioned by McCloud. Each panel shows a different part of the City being demolished by the storm; hence the reader gets to experience the scale of the catastrophe. During its occurrence Spider loses consciousness because of his fatal illness. The story *What I Know* begins with the gonzo journalist being trapped in his own head. The panels depict him sitting in the dark. Again the elusive textual possible world is granted a coherent, visible representation through comics.

In between Spider's hallucinations and Callahan's political machinations there are particular events and encounters that are influenced by both. In the second part of the story *The Cure* Jerusalem talks with the Transient prostitute who got involved with The Smiler. He sums up that "she's the whole story now" (Ellis and Robertson 1997-2002). The individual is put in the center of the narrative and close-up panels make it appear present and physical.

The tool used by Robertson and Ellis to evoke specific images in the reader's imagination is again closure. In *Transmetropolitan* "single panel images require the reader to invest more of their imagination in the construction of the narrative, and thus can enhance the transgressive power of the image" (Konx 2014: 33). The use of closure, close-up frames, overlapping panels and various kinds of transitions between them effectively builds up the final

encounter between Spider Jerusalem and The Smiler. After the journalist manages to bring the disgraced president down publicly, they meet again face to face. The power to shape a larger world, represented by Callahan and an individual, physical force, represented by Jerusalem, collide one last time in the final pages of the story *The Long Day Closes*, and the latter comes out victorious while the president ends up being arrested. Once The Smiler is no longer in power he levels up with Jerusalem and loses because on this narrative level the gonzo journalist is a much more capable character.

The epilogue of *Transmetropolitan's* main storyline takes place where the reader was introduced to this storyworld – in the mountain cabin. Ellis and Robertson put a narrative frame on the reader's experience of their storyworld. This kind of storytelling evokes feelings of finality and coherency. The reader entered this storyworld covered by snow and was placed on its outskirts, outside the City. At the end of the whole series, in September, Jerusalem's editor Mitchell Royce guides the reader back to the mountains. The epilogue takes place after the main storyline's conclusion; hence the setting on the outskirts of the storyworld is relevant. Royce talks with the tollbooth worker who was attacked by Spider and his assistants. The man and the tollgates symbolize the unchangeable, physical border of the City. Beyond the border the mountains begin. They are shown in their full scale on a large, two-page panel, which includes the title of the epilogue – *One More Time*. The mountains are covered in thick forests growing under the bright, blue sky, and although there are some signs of human interference the landscape appears as a wild one. The next panels follow Royce's car and often lack any word balloons hence the reader may experience a breath of fresh air, cognitively speaking. Piotr Gąsowski refers to Douglas Wolk when he explains that thanks to verbal communication through word balloons it is easier to “describe time and how it changes” (2016: 143). On the other hand, the panels which show the mountains serve to make the reader contemplate the clean environment. Time flows because of the presence of the car which is shown in constant

movement. When there are no diegetic word balloons physical objects are used to suggest the flow of time.

In the final pages the reader gains a perspective of a dragonfly moving around Spider's cabin. The bug occupies the background as characters talk with each other. The storyline makes a full circle as Yelena becomes the new Spider and even starts to resemble him visually. Jerusalem is thought to be retired because of his fatal illness; however, the final pages suggest that his one percent chance of survival is enough. The gonzo journalist smokes a cigarette and laughs. His laugh is represented by large, red lettering, which suggests the "expressions marked by intense emotions" (Gaşowski 2016: 250). The reader is able to imagine, thus hear the sound, as he/she is leaving Spider Jerusalem in his mountain cabin, along with the dragonfly flying away. The perspective of the bug visualizes the limited space occupied by an individual in the storyworld. A single being is invisible from a further distance. Eventually the world's extensiveness is emphasized on the last page of the story *One More Time*. The ultimate panel consists of an extremely long shot that encompasses mountain forests and the enormous City in the distance. The two locations work in opposition; yet they are both part of *Transmetropolitan's* complex and extensive storyworld.

In conclusion, as various comics scholars confirm, reading a comics is "an unconscious display of the impressive capabilities of our mind" (Gaşowski 2016: 293). Readers apply their cognitive systems to bring comics worlds to life. This complex mechanism does not only rely on the sense of vision but also on gathered information and mental models formed through the use of the other senses. Understanding the medium well Warren Ellis and Darick Robertson created a vast and alive storyworld full of distinct individuals and detailed inventory. The reader is recentered into Spider Jerusalem, the gonzo journalist of the cyberpunk world and experiences his individual perspective. Jerusalem's psyche, his habits and occupation enable both the creators and their readers to cut out specific textual possible worlds from the totality

and show them coherently, as separate constructs connected with the whole by the invisible narrative web. Several scholars have analyzed the storyworld of *Transmetropolitan* and compared it to their actual world, not only because in this case the fictional one resembles the real one in terms of its inventory, but because the fictional world is so vast, dynamic and immersive. For the time of the reading, through the proper use of the medium conducive to a successful recentering, it overwrites the reader's reality, becoming the hyperreality.

Chapter 5

CYBERPUNK 2077

Video games utilize properties of media that had come before and build upon their properties in order to produce fictional worlds that might become hyperreal once interacted with. To elaborate and question this statement this chapter discusses video game theories in context of possible worlds theory, as well as cognitive narratology and the cyberpunk genre. The subsequent analysis focuses on the specific case of the video game *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020), its fictional world and the narratives within. The gathered theory, as well as an overview of non-diegetic and transmedia elements surrounding the game help to visualize a bridge between the player's actual reality and the fictional world and serve to investigate whether experiencing such a world could be assessed as hyperreal. Further, the comparison of the fictional and the actual world, regarding their cyberpunk inventory, shall grant another perspective on the affinities between the two worlds.

Video games is a medium which can provide a temporal hyperreal experience for its user, applying its specific methods of engagement. Once the process of recentering, as described by Marie-Laure Ryan, is complete, the immersion welds the player in the actual world and the character in the fictional one. The player's reality is temporarily substituted. In that moment the fictional world becomes the player's hyperreality, as

it no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance. It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere. (Baudrillard 1994: 3)

Video game worlds are able to establish their own rationality based on the rules that the player follows in order to be properly recentered and eventually immersed. Nevertheless, video games

can simultaneously include narratives and maintain the illusion of space, which functions together with their rules in order to mask their operational nature. That indicates that immersive open world video games present a simulacrum. They can be so rich in details that a player starts to wonder whether their characters might have their own imagination, that can produce further simulations.

Jasper Juul observed that “video games are two different things at the same time: video games are real in that they consist of real rules with which players actually interact, and in that winning or losing a game is a real event. However, when winning a game by slaying a dragon, the dragon is not a real dragon but a fictional one” (2005: 12). The rules of a game remain real in a player’s actual reality because they are a non-diegetic element of a fictional world. They are the means of entering such a world and later allow the player to properly maneuver around it. Ian Bogost advocates that “this ability to execute a series of rules fundamentally separates computers from other media” (2007: 4). Once learnt, however, rules ideally become unnoticeable, similarly to letters in a novel, camera presence in a film or word balloons in a comic book. After that the player should be engaged with the fictional world and block the actual reality. Antonio José Planells de la Maza suggests that “ludofictional worlds may be studied from a Macrostructural Static Dimension, a Microstructural Dynamic Dimension and a Metaleptic Dimension” (2017: 6). Such a division serves to analyze video games on various levels, and should make it possible to provide a closer look at each step on the recentering process. It also allows one to examine more closely the pieces of the given video game instead of looking at the totality at once. Ian Bogost suggested another mode of analysis that complies with that purpose. His “unit operations are modes of meaning-making that privilege discrete, disconnected actions over deterministic, progressive systems” (Bogost 2006: 3). Unit operations aim to deconstruct a video game, perceive its world as structured of many smaller parts, and might as well be regarded as Lyotard’s concept of paralogy realized. That being said

,Bogost himself also reaches to postmodern thinkers, for instance in applying Deleuze's schizoanalysis.

Video games have established a certain unique tradition, yet some of their mechanics have existed as long as humanity itself: "Huizinga also emphasizes that play itself is older than culture, since animals like to play just like men do" (Mäyrä 2008: 20). To play any game, according to Johan Huizinga is to enter the 'magic circle', which leads to "a particular separation from the rules of everyday reality" (Mäyrä 2008: 20). Once a person engages in a gameplay he/she desires to be recentered into a fictional world. Some games such as tag or hide and seek are based only on the set of rules, players' physical presence and their imagination, while other games, such as chess or football require additional objects in order to properly engage in them. Those objects (chess board, ball) facilitate the fictional world's image produced within the 'magic circle', although its perspicuity still depends on the player's imagination. Video games on the other hand are able to facilitate their playground, that is a fictional world, by visualizing it to a player, because they "are complex software programs" (Bogost 2006: 55). This quality provides their creators with a chance to form worlds which appear real; hence the player should be more naturally immersed in them. Early video games such as *Pong*, relied on the player's imagination to add a narrative to the simplistic gameplay. In *Hamlet on the Holodeck* Janet Murray claimed that "*Tetris* is a perfect enactment of the overtasked lives of Americans in the 1990s" (1997: 144). When the visuals of the game are only illustrative the player's imagination is free to interpret them in any possible way. Since *Pong* and *Tetris*, however, the quality of video game graphics has improved immensely, and the player's imagination is no longer preoccupied with forming a fictional world around the rules of the game. Instead it is engaged to enhance the hyperreal experience of it, while the world itself is already formed in the audiovisual and interactive sense.

Video game worlds are created around the set of rules compacted in a game engine that is responsible for the video game's structure. Different genres of video games are built on different game engines; hence multiple video games from the same genre are similar in terms of gameplay mechanics. Ian Bogost states that "the first-person shooter (FPS) has played a fundamental role in founding the industry of game engines, assemblages of common software components and tools used to make other games" (2006: 55). FPS gameplay mechanics are one of the most recognizable in the gaming industry today. Players associate shooters with first-person perspective, and often with a visible weapon in a fictional character's possession. Bogost gives credit for popularizing this game engine to *Doom* (1993):

After the success of *Doom*, its developer iD Software recognized that they could capitalize not just on games they created, but also on helping other developers create similar and derivative games. The key to this opportunity was abstracting and extracting the game's core features, its most salient unit operations. iD turned that idea into the *Quake Engine*, which has become the basis for dozens of titles released since, including *HeXen 2* and *Half-Life*. (2006: 60)

FPS mechanics have become understandable, instinctive for many video game players. Various games that followed *Doom* and *Half-Life* have adapted them in order to offer users a familiar structure. The examples are not only war games such as *Call of Duty* or *Battlefield*. FPS might be survival horrors such as *Bioshock* and *Dying Light*. Furthermore, those mechanics can function in video games which put emphasis on their open-world aspects, games such as *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, *Borderlands* or *Cyberpunk 2077*. In Bogost's terminology the unit operations that established FPS gameplay in *Doom* (1993) have been reused and expanded in order to provide a structure for many games to come.

Some scholars suggest that "the study of games necessarily requires an autonomous terrain completely separate from other fields, among them Espen Aarseth and Frans Mäyrä"

(Bogost 2006: 172). Through the perspective of ludologists it is crucial to examine the mechanics which build up the structure of a videogame and its rules. However, once a player gets familiar with a structure it becomes an assimilated element of a presented fictional world. Henceforth, in a hyperreal fashion, it turns invisible, being replaced by its counterpart in a fictional space. While in the actual world a player presses a button to make a character jump, in the fictional world the characters just jump. Being immersed in the experience a player wants to forget about the structure. Immersion itself is “mentally absorbing and a process, a change, a passage from one mental state to another. It is characterized by diminishing critical distance to what is shown and increasing emotional involvement in what is happening” (Grau 2003: 13). Immersion is achieved in multiple ways, although in video games it is inherently tied with interactivity and agency: “The main concepts that have been used to understand the distinctive nature of video games regarding the access and transformation of their worlds has been those of interactivity, agency and immersion” (Planells de la Maza 2017: 112). Planells de la Maza underlines that metalepsis in video games concerns the player’s agency, including its limitations. The player’s possible involvement is limited to the game’s creator’s design; however, once learnt the limitations blend in or fade. They can be noticed only if immersion is somehow broken. Grau writes that “virtual realities—both past and present—are in essence immersive” (2003: 15). Metalepsis can be observed from the outside. The player might shift focus between the actual and fictional, but it is impossible to be immersed in both worlds simultaneously. According to Grau illusion of virtual realities “can temporarily overwhelm perception of the difference between game space and reality” (2003: 17). Video games offer an interactive virtual space. Polish scholar Michał Kłosiński explicates that for Grau reduction of media distance “is associated with rejecting illusion for the sake of overwhelming the receiver with virtual (hyper)reality” (2018: 107). He further refers to Marie-Laure Ryan for whom “hyperreality is a proposition resulting on the one side from immersion, and on the other side

from allowing a player to act in a fictional world” (Kłosiński 2018: 105). Some video games invite their players to roam around the aforementioned open-worlds, enhancing what might be assessed as spatial immersion – one of the types of immersion listed by Gordon Calleja (2011: 43-44).

There are video games of which fictional worlds are invisible or only implied (*Tetris*, *Pong*), while the contemporary video game market has seen multiple games that represent the opposite pole. Those games are rich in rules, therefore gameplay mechanics; thus they are alluring from the ludological perspective. On the other hand they consist of specific narratives and fleshed out characters so they might be of interest to narratologists. Planells de la Maza understands that “relationship between *ludus* and fiction is established from the idea of a dynamic playable world and allows the transfer of one possible world to other without ever questioning the general structure of the system” (2017: 102). Open-world RPG (role-playing) video games are the best example of this complex relationship because they provide an open virtual space that a player has to explore. Moving around a virtual space requires getting familiar with the rules, which later become unobtrusive, while the player is recentered into a character in a fictional world. Furthermore, the player is able to take on different roles upon each gameplay, as a character in an RPG might be customized, while the open space is packed with possible worlds to encounter. Planells de la Maza notices it on the example of role-playing open-world video game *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009): “*Dragon Age* does not provide a linear structure – as occurs, for example, with graphic adventures – but an open ludofictional world with a set of primary possible worlds to overcome and secondary possible worlds that provide distraction and parallel adventures” (2017: 157). Contemporary open world role-playing video games have complex structures, facilitated by detailed graphics and compelling, intersecting narratives. Playing a game in their case can be assessed as experiencing a world. A virtual reality replaces the actual reality, turning into a hyperreality for the time of the experience. *Cyberpunk*

2077 (2020) is an example of a video game which not only is an open-world RPG but also belongs to the cyberpunk genre and is a part of a larger transmedia universe.

Contemporary storyworlds quite often exceed one medium. When it comes to those proposed in today's video games the case of getting involved with them may get complicated. While it might be enough to turn on the game on a given device, learn its rules, and through naturalized metalepsis translate those rules into a temporal reality, the process of getting familiar with it starts long before. Storyworlds of many contemporary video games are teased and advertised in advance so that a potential player would feel invited to experience them. Furthermore, a video game can become one of many points of entry to a storyworld when it is a larger transmedia construct. Media scholar Henry Jenkins noticed already in 2006, on the example of *The Matrix* franchise that "transmedia storytelling becomes more intuitive" (2006 :130). Contemporary instances such as *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020) prove that he was right, and transmedia storytelling is now a normal practice. While the hyperreal experience of a storyworld is total and coherent, the path to it is fragmented and different for each user.

Before the lunch meeting of *Cyberpunk 2077* in 2020 I asked the potential players from the community five open questions that were supposed to elicit their attitude towards the storyworld they were about to enter. Through a form, created in Google Forms tool, entitled "Cyberpunk 2077 expectations" I asked the following questions:

- 1) What do you expect from *Cyberpunk 2077*?
- 2) What is the first thing you are going to do in Night City?
- 3) What is the most immersive aspect of the game for you?
- 4) What are you the most excited for in *Cyberpunk 2077*?

5) Do you think *Cyberpunk 2077* will influence your own life? How?

(https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdNyKrgKhbCojNVtJDFogCfCMQNPiyed3_5WkCdoq9Ubwij5g/viewform?usp=pp_url)

Being aware of the genre of *Cyberpunk 2077* and its gameplay mechanics before the game's premiere players might have made predictions and assumptions. Nineteen respondents provided answers to each question.

In the response to the first question majority of respondents mentioned the word "immersion" as their expectation. Others also referred to the gameplay mechanics, mainly focusing on the open-world aspect of *Cyberpunk 2077*. An almost equal amount of respondents noted that they are interested in the narrative of the game and its role-playing quality. Those answers reflect the concepts which define the nature of video games, observed by Planells de la Maza, that is "interactivity, agency and immersion" (2017: 112). They serve as a bridge between player's actual world and the virtual storyworld of a video game. Once the bridge is crossed, the player's focus is recentered into a fictional world. In case of *Cyberpunk 2077* the world is paradoxically open within the certain limits while in most part it is filled with the metropolis called Night City.

Therefore, answering the second question one respondent mentioned gameplay mechanic, that is photomode, as it is a mechanic that allows players to take photos as if they were tourists in the city. Another one referred to completing quests, hence being guided through the virtual world by the narrative structure imposed by its creators. The rest of the respondents answered as if they were visiting the real place. They mentioned walking around the city, driving or simply exploring. One respondent again referred to immersion. Such responses suggest that the players would like to experience the video game as a hyperreality.

In question three players were expected to define what they mean by “immersion”. Aside from repeating statements about open-world and a compelling story, respondents focused on the role-playing elements of the game, mainly character customization, to which I will return later in this chapter. Regarding the story one respondent mentioned the decision making aspect of an RPG while another highlighted combat as its most immersive component. A different answer was the following: “Being able to jump into an online game world that I have been gaming in since around 1987” (Google Forms, 2020). It most likely refers to the tabletop role-playing game, *Cyberpunk 2020*, written by Mike Pondsmith, and published in 1988. *Cyberpunk 2077*, the video game takes place in the same storyworld as *Cyberpunk 2020* TTRPG (tabletop role-playing game) so they are both elements of a larger transmedia construct. Three respondents answered that the first person perspective of *Cyberpunk 2077* is the most immersive for them, while one respondent referred to “the realism of CDPRs engine used to render it” (Google Forms, 2020).

Question four builds up on the previous ones by appealing to player’s feeling of excitement, evoked by the promise of entering another world. In their answers some respondents refer to the weapon inventory, available in the game, while two of them write about the actor from the actual world, Keanu Reeves. Using motion-capture technology, Reeves’s body was used to create the character of Johnny Silverhand who plays a crucial role in *Cyberpunk 2077* main storyline. In the actual world the actor was involved in the game’s promotion before the premiere.

The final, fifth question was formed in order to evaluate the influence of the hyperreal video game experience on the player’s actual reality. A respondent who claims to have been involved with this storyworld since 1987, answers that it has had a continuous influence upon his/her life for thirty years. Other respondents are unsure of the game’s impact on their actual lives. It appears as if they were well aware of the border between real and hyperreal, since being

immersed and later being recentered back into the actual world is a matter of choice for players acquainted with the medium.

After *Cyberpunk 2077* had been released I conducted the second survey, entitled “Cyberpunk 2077 impressions”, using Google Forms tool, asking the following six questions:

- 1) Has the game met your expectations?
- 2) What do you think about the game’s main storyline and side quests?
- 3) Has the game immersed you? How?
- 4) Who is your favorite character? Why?
- 5) How many hours have you played the game?
- 6) Do you consider *Cyberpunk 2077*’s world alive? Why?

(https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdKBaCa_vNS-wxw1wHo9qiKZkHoJ2Eq3AKtXIZk3zUAFu9hwA/viewform?usp=pp_url)

Around ninety one respondents provided answers to each question in this survey. The significant increase in the number of respondents may have been caused by *Cyberpunk 2077*’s popularity short time after its premiere.

In the answer to the first question around twenty two respondents stated that the game has met their expectations, around twenty expressed mixed feelings, while around fifteen gave a negative response. The negative answers were explained by the “lack of certain features” (Google Forms 2021), technical issues or in some cases an unsatisfying story. Such responses might have resulted from the clash of the possible worlds of players’ expectations, with the world actually given to them in the video game.

On the other hand, responses to the second question were overwhelmingly positive. Aside from a few voices of critique *Cyberpunk 2077*'s story and side quests have been well received by the players. I will return to this point once focusing on the role of the narrative in *Cyberpunk 2077*.

In question three the majority of the respondents established that the game had immersed them. Explaining what was immersive, they mentioned the open-world, first-person perspective, the ability to customize the character and the interactive story with multi-layered characters. These answers correspond to the types of immersion listed by Marie-Laure Ryan: "ludic immersion, narrative immersion (spatial immersion, temporal immersion, emotional immersion)" (2022: 168).

Responses to question four considered many various characters that appear in *Cyberpunk 2077*, and it is difficult to elicit one that stands out. This can prove that players being immersed in the game might get emotionally attached to the fictional beings. Many respondents gave reasons for their choice as if those beings were people they actually had met in their own reality. Here are a few examples:

- 1) Johnny. I hated him at first, but through gameplay and missions he softened up, and I missed him after let him merged with AI at mikoshi.
- 2) Panam. She is a strong woman, with a kind heart, and I like this and I admire people with those qualities. Impossible not to fall in love with her.
- 3) V - feels like I am in the game BABY
- 4) Jackie, a good and fun companion for adventures
- 5) Victor Vector and Jackie because they are decent humans.

- 6) River Ward, beautiful backstory, very emotional relationship, feels like a real person.
(Google Forms, 2021)

All those characters are part of the coherent, capturing narrative while the possibility to interact with them and perceive them in an open-world environment deepens the emotional immersion.

Question five considers the relationship between the flow of time in player's actual world and the world of *Cyberpunk 2077*. The provided responses show that players spent from thirty to over two hundred hours on playing the video game. In the world of the game itself the main storyline takes around three months. The sense of flowing time in an open-world video game might be compressed due to the narrative constraints put upon the storyworld by its creators. Here the temporal immersion takes the lead.

The final question again refers to the hyperreal experience of playing the video game. Do you consider *Cyberpunk 2077*'s world alive? Why? Most of the respondents who gave positive answer justify it by referring to the characters that were more outlined and had greater narrative value in the whole story. On the other side, respondents who gave negative answer stated that the AI of the less important NPCs (non-player characters) was poor and the open-world itself was empty and seemed fake. *Cyberpunk 2077* upon its premiere faced multiple technical issues that might have resulted in immersion-breaking experiences.

Cyberpunk 2077 was advertised as a part of a larger transmedia construct. As Henry Jenkins noted contemporary storytellers "think about storytelling in terms of creating openings for consumer participation" (2006: 169). *Cyberpunk 2077* had this demand covered already thirty years prior to its release as it is based on the acclaimed tabletop RPG, created by Mike Pondsmith. In TTRPGs players are encouraged to build their own interactive narratives, using structural elements, aesthetics, characters and mechanics listed in the TTRPG's manual. Therefore players had been able to participate in worlds that included some elements of

Cyberpunk 2077's storyworld long before the video game was released. Furthermore, "for *Cyberpunk 2077*, the hype was fueled by a large-scale marketing campaign. The 131 million USD spent was equal to 45% of the whole game's budget (Woldański, 2021), placing the game firmly in the Triple-A market segment" (Siuda et al., 2023: 652). Many promises made by the video game producers were unfortunately broken as the game faced technical issues. As a marketing practice, the actor Keanu Reeves, who in the game portrayed Johnny Silverhand, praised the game during presentations and interviews. Reeves is an actor who exists in the actual world, and in the game his face belongs to Silverhand while his persona is associated with cyberpunk genre in general. The reason for this is that he started in the film adaptation of William Gibson's short story *Johnny Mnemonic* (1995) as the eponymous character, in *The Matrix* (1999) as hacker Thomas Anderson who turns out to be the savior of humanity, Neo, and later in *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) which was discussed in chapter three. Hence apart from being a famous actor Reeves maintains an important role in the metaleptic process. Metalepsis, the term used by Gerard Genette is explained by Monika Fludernik as "an existential crossing of the boundaries between the extradiegetic and diegetic levels of a narrative or the (intra)diegetic and metadiegetic levels; or, in short, as the move of existants or actants from any hierarchically ordered level into one above or below (also possibly skipping intermediate levels)" (2003: 383). It refers to characters crossing boundaries between two worlds, and later it was applied by Planells de la Maza to video games. The scholar states that metalepsis "allows the analysis of the access to a ludofictional world from cultural exceptionality and, thus, from necessary learning" (Planells de la Maza 2017: 114). Reeves as a face of the cyberpunk genre informs the potential player of the aesthetics of the game he advertises. Such a player starts learning about the storyworld's properties by associating Reeves with the genre, simultaneously getting used to the role he portrays. It results in making the storyworld appear more familiar for someone who might have never heard of it. Keanu Reeves' persona is used for marketing,

pointing at the genre and serving as a model for the video game's character; thus he takes part in every step of the metaleptic process. Furthermore players got used to *Cyberpunk 2077*'s storyworld, not only by following its strictly advertising practices, but also by learning about it from another sources that are a part of a designed transmedia construct. Planells de la Maza writes that "of all the exterior influences that a video game may receive, one of the most determinant is provided by transmedia culture" (2017: 115). Before the game's release, *Cyberpunk 2077*'s developer CD Projekt Red had collaborated with Dark Horse Comics to publish the art book entitled *The World of Cyberpunk 2077* (2020) and comics series *Cyberpunk 2077: Trauma Team* (2020). The first one is a guidebook written by the journalists of the *Night City Inquirer* so it provides a diegetic perspective on this storyworld. The reader learns from it about the specific inventory and visual aesthetics establishing a coherent fictional framework to be later filled by the ludic experience. Comics series on the other hand provides a distinct narrative that is set in that storyworld. It indicates that it is populated by multidimensional characters with compelling stories and suggests that the video game will contain many more of them.

After the video game had been released CD Projekt Red continued to build their transmedia storyworld by publishing another comics with Dark Horse, one of which has won the prestigious Hugo award (*Cyberpunk 2077: Big City Dreams*, 2023). There also appeared a novel entitled *No Coincidence* (2023) which takes place in Night City. Further, the game's developer worked with Netflix to create Anime TV series, entitled *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners* (2022), while it is rumored that the live-action film set in this storyworld is in the works. Finally, three years after *Cyberpunk 2077*'s premiere in 2020, CD Projekt Red released a big story expansion entitled *Phantom Liberty* featuring another famous film actor Idris Elba, alongside patch 2.0 that restructured some of the video game's mechanics, making it a more fluent gaming experience. All the examples mentioned above while being read or watched separately present

a specific possible world. However, if perceived as a whole they form a carefully structured transmedia construct with the video game in its center. CD Projekt Red has kept working and improving their storyworld for three years after its problematic release. Eventually, in December 2023, the game got its final version which includes all the improvements and expansions, titled *Cyberpunk 2077: Ultimate Edition*. Furthermore *Cyberpunk 2077* has received the award for the “Best Ongoing Game” at The Game Awards 2023, which summed up its three year evolution.

Various indicators point at *Cyberpunk 2077*, emphasizing its diegetic structure of a world. Miguel Sicart in the conclusion of his book *Play Matters* observed that “only play in the era of computing machinery has the opportunity to connect us to a whole world besides the world in which we play” (2014: 100). The world in the case of *Cyberpunk 2077* is made familiar for its potential visitors because of the surrounding transmedia practices. Furthermore, its genre is clearly stated in the title and the game is advertised by Keanu Reeves, an actor associated with cyberpunk films.

In his book on visual cultures in science fiction Paweł Frelik noted that “history of video games is therefore, to a large degree a history of science fiction games” (2017: 35). He refers to a significant number of video games ascribed to the science fiction genre. This medium has turned out to be quite efficient in portraying the unknown worlds which science fiction often produces. *Cyberpunk 2077* falls perfectly in this category. Following ludologist Espen Aerseth, Frelik maintains that “science fiction games put players in the position where they must take responsibility for the future” (2017: 79). Aerseth observes that video games are ergodic because in them “non-trivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text” (1997: 1). Therefore ordering all the elements of the storyworld to make it a hyperreal experience requires effort; players are willing to make this effort in order to be immersed.

In the case of *Cyberpunk 2077*, the recentering process commences when the video game is opened on a chosen gaming device, whether a console or a computer. Then a player witnesses the loading screen with the game's title and, after pressing the button, the word "breaching...". The paratexts of the main menu are non-diegetic elements of the video game's storyworld, yet they are already shaped by its aesthetics and inventory. In this fashion "breaching..." means simply loading, while a word "breach" is taken out of hacker's vocabulary, inherent to a cyberpunk world. The reality of the player and the reality of the game are overlapping, while the player is stepping into a magic circle, which should result in the hyperreal experience. Michał Kłosiński establishes that for Jean Baudrillard "there is no difference between virtuality and hyperreality" (2018: 152). Further, to explain the notion of magic circle and crossing its line, the Polish scholar refers to Franz Kafka's short story and the words of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Kłosiński maintains that in magic circle "one world replaces the other, reality is replaced by hyperreality" (2018: 158), however "any gesture of creating a line is always a discourse, an action with words" (2018: 162). Hence the hyperreality of a video game is not permanent. The player retains the freedom to move back and forth between the virtual world and the actual reality.

Nevertheless, the first steps on the recentering path might not be that obvious. From unexperienced players the game requires that one learns the rules needed to play. Other gamers who had played FPSs (first-person shooters) and RPGs (role-playing games) before might already be to some extent acquainted with the gameplay mechanics of *Cyberpunk 2077*. After going through the main menu the player is asked to select a difficulty level. Here he/she might interfere with the game's system, choosing the scale of ludic experience. The more difficult the game is the more fluency with its rules it demands of the player. Further, during the game some quests are more difficult at the beginning because the player's character is unexperienced. Sebastian Domsch notes that "a task that is tried early will be done with a relatively 'weak'

character, which might make it much more challenging than if it had been attempted as the last task in a series” (2013: 70). In *Cyberpunk 2077* the level of difficulty is marked next to a quest on a map. Some quests are harder at the beginning even though game’s difficulty is set to be easy. It is structured that way so the player would gain more experience and street credit doing other in-game activities, and come back later to the more challenging locations because some areas are meant to be visited during particular segments of the narrative. In this fashion game mechanics facilitate the narrative.

After choosing the overall difficulty the player commences to create his/her character, an avatar, a controllable entity within the storyworld. In *Cyberpunk 2077* the playable protagonist already has a name, which is V. The first choice the player has to make while customizing the character concerns V’s lifepath. There are three options: Nomad, Streetkid and Corpo. Each refers to the narrative of the protagonist’s life prior to the events of the game, establishing the backstory. Next the player is able to customize V’s physical appearance, as *Cyberpunk 2077* is a role-playing experience. Planells de la Maza, again referring to the video game *Dragon Age*, explicates that “from the point of view of gender studies, the game equalizes man and woman in its ludic approach: the protagonist, regardless of sex, has the same typology of actions – including options of a homosexual nature” (2017: 158). Almost the same is true for *Cyberpunk 2077*, as V is customizable to a large degree; even the size of his/her genitals might be altered; however, the later romance options depend on either male or female voice chosen in the character creation menu. As Tamara Banbury and Kelly Fritsch underline “this is a very limited and reductive way of expressing gender variation” (2022: 230). Furthermore, it argues with the principles of a cyberpunk world, in which ideal gender representation is a totally fluent concept. Even though the customization tool in *Cyberpunk 2077* is flawed it still allows the player to give shape to an entity, using the imaginary order, described by Jacques Lacan: “The in-game representation itself may reflect the imaginary relationship created by the subject only

through transfer” (Kłosiński 2018: 206). Although V has a preset name, voice, either male or female, and his/her customization options are limited, it might be enough for the player to feel as if some characteristics imagined by him or her are now a part of a virtual individual with a unique personality. Jacques Lacan states that “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other” (1966: 143) and that “we can also see that the dimension of truth emerges only with the appearance of language” (1966: 143). “The other” as described by Lacan, unreachable by an individual physically grounded in the actual reality, might find one of its representations in the possible world, not only by the appearance of language itself but by the appearance of virtuality. “The other” of the player mixes with the preset features of V resulting in a distinct entity for each player. As a consequence, the player controls some version of “the other” in a virtual environment. The dispersed subject therefore allows humans to transgress the boundaries of the actual world, dealing with the unconscious projected on an avatar.

By choosing a class the player actually chooses where her/his V comes from, hence from where the player will enter Night City. Character creation ends with the choice of attributes which defines V’s skills. Then the player can see a summary of all the choices and after the confirmation and the loading screen the storyworld appears, viewed in the first-person perspective. Frans Mäyrä confirms that “the first person, ‘insider view’ into a realistically rendered 3D environment became one of the key interface languages that most gamers today recognize and understand” (2008: 113). The first person perspective was popularized by *Doom* (1993) and proved to work well in FPSs (first-person shooters). It allows the player to perceive the storyworld directly, through the eyes of one of its inhabitants. Gordon Calleja notes that “an important component of player involvement is the shortening of the subjective distance between player and game environment, often yielding a sensation of inhabiting the space represented on-screen” (2011: 2). In those words he defines immersion, but they can be applied to define the role of first-person view as well.

In order to reassure the sense of presence in the storyworld each path chosen by the player (Nomad, Streetkid, Corpo) begins by the sequence of V looking into the mirror. At this moment the player gets the visual confirmation that he/she as the created character is actually there, inside the storyworld. The player's focus is recentered to V's perspective. *Cyberpunk 2077* also offers the possibility to use third person perspective but only while driving vehicles. Commenting on another open world RPG video game, *Skyrim*, Planells de la Maza observes that "while the first person is appropriate for solving all the necessary actions involved in a specific combat, the third person is ideal both for getting a better field of vision in the journey through *Skyrim* and for stealthily fleeing an enemy that is too strong" (2017: 222). Adequately it might be more comfortable to drive a car in *Cyberpunk 2077*, using the TPP (third person perspective).

To enable interaction with the storyworld the player has to get familiar with HUD (heads-up display), the on-screen interface that includes necessary information, such as location on the map, health level, equipped weapon, and so on. Interface is a paratext of a video game; however, in *Cyberpunk 2077* it is designed to be parallel with the storyworld's aesthetics and inventory. As a person living in a cyberpunk world may have the eyesight influenced by cybernetic enhancements, the first-person perspective of such a person has to represent it accordingly. Hence all the non-diegetic panels with information and tutorials for the player blend with diegetic panels that V is able to notice. Some, such as a minimap or a health bar might be seen by both, player and V, while notifications which button on the controller to press are obviously meant solely for the player. V on the other hand perceives the visualization of the incoming phone calls and notifications of his/her malfunctioning cybernetic system. Using V's ability to scan the surroundings for information, collecting the usable 'loot' and interacting with the environment, usually by pressing only one button, function as metaleptic activities that immerse the player.

The narrative in *Cyberpunk 2077* is non-linear since it is set in an open world, and it unfolds according to the player's choices. Ian Bogost states that "videogames can be played as individual linear experiences that might in turn be describable in narrative form, but such analysis is useful only as an exemplar for the broader abstract meaning the text's unit operations elucidate" (2006: 71). He speaks against putting strict narrative frames upon a video game, instead suggesting looking more closely into its specific units. *Cyberpunk 2077* consists of abundance of units, some of which might even be missed by the player on his/her first playthrough.

First of all, there is a complex narrative of V, the protagonist of the game, who tries to make it big in Night City. It is a story of ambition and pursuit of greatness. This goal is even directly stated as one of the characters, Dexter DeShawn, asks V "Would you rather live in peace as Mr. Nobody, die ripe, old and smellin' slightly of urine? Or go down for all times in a blaze of glory smellin' near like posies, 'thout seein' your thirtieth?" (*Cyberpunk 2077*). Cyberpunk worlds often depict capitalist reality, in that fashion resembling the present actual world:

the mediated intimacy of historical events and the eventual emergence of cyber-war; and the overall onslaught of the society of the spectacle and the virtualization of finance capital. These all became more evident, more strongly felt in quotidian late-capitalist reality. In a way, several of cyberpunk's central speculative elements seemed to have 'bled' straight from fiction into the everyday. (Tomberg 2021: 81)

V starts from scratch in exactly such a reality. Each of the initial lifepaths eventually puts him/her on the bottom of the capitalist food chain. There V encounters Jackie, a character who is in the same position and shares V's ideals. His function is to make the storyworld more familiar to the player. Jackie quickly becomes V's close friend and a guide for the player, hence

another unit worthy of examining more closely is the theme of human relationships in the technologically advanced environment.

Jackie Welles' physical appearance indicates a cyberpunk inventory of this storyworld, because his face and neck is marked by cybernetic alterations. Lars Schmeink establishes that "In order to function in a technologically saturated cyberpunk world, the body thus has to 'become a cyborg' and be 'resituated in technological space and refigured in technological terms'" (2020: 139). Therefore, in *Cyberpunk 2077* most characters are transhuman cyborgs with more or less perceivable body alterations; however, they retain human properties. Regarding the principal of minimal departure, the player naturally grows fond of characters with human apparitions thus Jackie's face is only slightly modified. Moreover, Jackie is of Latino descent hence his character indicates the cultural diversity of Night City's population. Last but not least Jackie's life dream fits the capitalist cyberpunk reality – to get rich and to become a legend even though he wants to achieve it the cyberpunk way, i.e., illegally, with the use of violence. Jackie accompanies V during the first quests in the game, and he is present during the first person cutscene that depicts life of a beginner mercenary in Night City. Planells de la Maza explicates the function of cutscenes as follows:

In other words, all user interaction is suspended and the player's indexical term is lost to make way for a video scene, either to introduce the game's fictional framework – when there was no previous interaction – to give a dramatic ending to a world – for example, with the spectacular appearance of a powerful enemy – or, to move the game to other spatial-temporal coordinates. (2017: 130-131).

The cutscene with Jackie serves the last purpose mentioned above but also informs the player about the storyworld's aesthetics and inventory. Later the player regains control, and while being a passenger in Jackie's car he/she might look around, noticing the inside of the vehicle and cyberpunk city outside.

The player is gradually given more freedom to gather information about the storyworld. V might collect shards, which are collectible storage devices consisting of diegetic texts, articles, books, or personal entries of NPCs. They are all possible worlds that might be entered through reading a text; however, they provide context to the whole storyworld as well. V enters a shard into the special socket in his/her body and is able to perceive its contents. Further, information may be collected by watching ads displayed in the elevators and on the streets and by using the access to diegetic websites and e-mails, technology also available in the present actual world of the player. The image appearing out of the gathered data reveals a dystopian, hyper capitalist reality that somehow is able to function. In Night City the big corporations are in power, while a large part of its population remains poor. Everyone has access to technology through which the human body is advertised as a sexualized commodity.

V experiences becoming a transhuman cyborg himself/herself while sitting in the chair of Viktor, a ripperdoc. Ripperdocs are people who have the skills to install various devices and enhancements into the human body. At the beginning of the game Viktor gives V a set of new artificial eyes that improve the quality of vision. After the change the player might notice the improvement as well – the picture appears more clear and detailed. Transformation into a transhuman cyborg is not only arbitrary; it makes the actual difference in gameplay.

Furthermore, characters other than Jackie have visible, technological alterations of the body. A significant example is the gang called Maelstrom, of which members are addicted to body enhancements, to the point when most of them resemble horrific machines. One of the main quests, “The Pickup” has V and Jackie face Maelstrom gangsters in their headquarters. Multiple mechanic implants go hand in hand with the increased risk of what is called ‘cyberpsychosis’. The gangsters are therefore extremely dangerous and unpredictable. ‘The Pickup’ has couple various outcomes which depend on actions taken or non-taken by V. The narrative paths are forking, hence creating possible outcomes. Each of them is a possible world,

that becomes actual by choosing a certain path. The very process of choosing often occurs under pressure, for instance when Maelstrom leader is pointing a gun right into the screen. The textual actual world of the video game depends on the chosen narrative path. Planells de la Maza calls 'secondary possible worlds' the "ludofictional offerings that the player may accept without destabilizing the structure of ludofictional worlds" (2017: 130). Forking paths were prepared by the game designers; however, making choices along the way each player might patch up a specific, personal narrative in which other options remain not actualized possible worlds.

Another significant technology that makes up *Cyberpunk 2077* inventory is braindance (BD). In order to conduct the big heist in Konpeki Plaza, which is a building belonging to the Arasaka corporation, V has to study certain braindance recordings. BD is a technology that allows the recording of someone's sensory experience. Marie-Laure Ryan recounts the initial predictions concerning VR technology in the actual reality: "The computer would keep track of all our past actions and creations, and since time spent in the system would be a significant part of our lives, these digital archives would become a substitute for memory. We would be able to relive earlier experiences by simply rerunning the software" (Ryan 2001: 49) This description might as well refer to BD technology from *Cyberpunk 2077*; however, in the actual world "the boldness of this vision was quickly lapped up by VR theorists" (Ryan 2001: 49). In *Cyberpunk 2077*, BD works as an ideal VR system. Its user might enter the possible world projected through another individual's sensory apparatus. Furthermore, such a recorded experience is later edited and examined. In this storyworld BDs can be commodities which consumers plug into to enjoy themselves, although they might also serve to influence the textual actual world. V employs braindance of a character named Evelyn Parker to study the location of his/her future heist. She was in Konpeki Plaza before thus her experience in the form of BD provides a helpful tool. The recording is a limited possible world, that can result in an uncertain prediction of what the robbers might encounter in Konpeki Plaza during the actual heist.

'The Heist', the main quest which proceeds a transition from Act one to Act two of the game, includes the major shift in the main storyline, and drastically changes the state of the main characters. V and Jackie attempt to steal the biochip, called Relic, which as a result should make them rich and well-known around Night City's criminal underbelly. However, in the apartment of Yorinobu Arasaka where the Relic is kept, the possible world made up of expectations and previous plans collides with the actual event, influenced by multiple variables. There V and Jackie witness the murder of the head of the Arasaka corporation, Saburo, committed by his son, Yorinobu. The turbulence and dynamics of power at the highest levels of a corporate structure establish yet another unit of operation worth observing in *Cyberpunk 2077's* forking narrative. The mercenaries hide behind the translucent screen during this occurrence, hence V's first person perspective makes it actual. The event is a fixed element of the narrative; however, the player is able to move the camera around, and later to move V, in order to escape the Konpeki Plaza with the Relic. Eventually Jackie is killed during the escape. At this point V is emotionally engaged with Jackie, and so is supposed to be the player. Gordon Calleja notes that "the player's active input creates the potential for a more intense emotional experience, whether satisfying or frustrating, than nonergodic media provide" (2011 :135). The affective or emotional immersion established in this case through direct interactions with Jackie, his role of the first guide in this storyworld, and his important role in the narrative, result in making his death feel significant. Furthermore, when he passes away the player has to make the decision what to do with his body. There are a couple of options to choose from, and each reflects V's attitude towards his deceased friend.

The Heist goes wrong, V is double-crossed, while he/she preserves the stolen biochip in his/her head. In the turmoil V is also shot, and the contents of the Relic mixes with the contents of his/her mind, while the Relic proves to be a device that contains the mind of another individual named Johnny Silverhand, portrayed by Keanu Reeves. Between Act one and Act

two, the player takes control of Johnny in the interlude. This linear segment presents the possible world of the past. Johnny Silverhand was a rockman and a terrorist who blew up the Arasaka tower in the year 2023. The colors of the paratexts visible on the screen change to blue thus the player can notice that he/she controls another character. Johnny's narrative is a unit that focuses on many motifs such as an anti-capitalist revolution, individual freedom and on a love stronger than the boundaries of the physical world. Silverhand claims that he is certain of his goal during the terrorist attack: "Get the payload on the elevator, arm it, let gravity do its thing. Explosion rocks the foundation, tower crumbles - chaos, screaming, roll credits" (*Cyberpunk 2077*). Later however he surprises his companions by revealing that he has another purpose, i.e., to find his lost love interest, Alt Cunningham. Johnny is caught after the terrorist attack while his friends assume he died. Meanwhile Saburo Arasaka manages to download Johnny's consciousness into the Relic. This biochip works quite similarly to Dixie Flatline's construct from William Gibson's *Neuromancer*; however, there are some significant differences. In *Neuromancer* the construct was a version of Flatline's original consciousness, recorded and limited by the storage space, and it might have been interacted with following the user's will, while Johnny's chip is bound by V's body, and is set to take total control over it in the near future. Furthermore, Johnny is thought to be the same individual as prior to being downloaded by Arasaka. However, from 2023 to 2077 he was as if hibernated on the chip. In 2077 when the Relic is damaged, Johnny's consciousness begins to replace V's. Throughout the main storyline Silverhand is an entity that can exist in three worlds. Sharing V's body he exists in the textual actual world of the video game; however, he is also present in the possible world of V's psyche and he can enter the virtual world. Only V can perceive Silverhand's figure appearing around, as a virtual ghost. For V, Johnny is an individual with his own fears and desires, a threat to his/her own existence, and a system of digital signs which resembles a man. Jacques Lacan states that "the subject, the Cartesian subject, is what is presupposed by the unconscious— I

have shown that elsewhere. The Other is the dimension required by the fact that speech affirms itself as truth. The unconscious is, between the two of them, their cut in action” (1966: 712). The unconscious of Silverhand and V intertwines too, while the terrorist’s Other might have its own digital avatar. In order to coherently present how two individuals may occupy one body, the video game allows the player to control Silverhand during the memory of the attack on Arasaka tower in 2023. After this sequence the player controls V in yet another possible world, which is a virtual plane. Its visuals reflect the lines of bluish code forming the actual shapes of rooms and stairs. In this digital structure V encounters the red figure of a stranger – Johnny Silverhand. Even though it is a virtual world the player can press the button to “tap the stranger” (*Cyberpunk 2077*), thus making a physical interaction. To this Johnny answers: “And you? Who are you?” (*Cyberpunk 2077*). V and Johnny collide with each other, as the physical world clashes with the virtual world. They might talk, fight and argue, yet each of them needs the physical body in order to exist in the textual actual world. Their dynamic is tied to the main storyline of *Cyberpunk 2077* and eventually leads to the narrative crossroads.

Regarding the main storyline and from the perspective of the possible worlds theory, another significant character in *Cyberpunk 2077* is Alt Cunningham. Similar to Johnny Silverhand she exists in a couple possible worlds which can be assessed as such from the perspective of V in the year 2077. At first Alt was a human being, one of the best netrunners in the history of Night City. Netrunners in the storyworld of *Cyberpunk 2077* are hackers who use cyberdecks to penetrate and exploit the Net, the cyberspace. She is also present in the possible world of Johnny Silverhand’s memories, accessible for V. Further, it is worth analyzing the unit of her story through feminist perspective. Lisa Yaszek starts her text on feminist cyberpunk with the following passage:

With their depictions of environmentally devastated near-futures ruled by global corporations and gangs where leather-clad hackers, technologically-augmented street

samurai, and secretive artificial intelligences (AI) compete for survival in both the virtual and physical worlds, women have long written stories that anticipate, dramatize, and extend the themes and techniques of cyberpunk fiction. (2020: 32)

In addition she provides some examples of female writers, such as Mary Shelley, who emphasized transhumanist and posthumanist tropes. Yaszek states that “women writing feminist proto-cyberpunk used the figure of the part-organic, part-technological cyborg to rethink the relations of science, technology, and sex/gender in more positive ways” (2020: 33). On the other hand, Alt Cunningham is sexualized as was Molly in *Neuromancer*, which should be considered a negative, stereotypical depiction of a female character. The player first encounters her while searching Johnny’s memories. There she immediately has sex with Johnny, while the player witnesses it from the first person perspective. The relationship between Johnny and Alt is violent and dynamic. Later she is kidnapped by Arasaka because the corporation wants to control the program she wrote, the Soukiller. This program enables its user to transfer an individual consciousness into a biochip or database. When Johnny attempts to save Alt her physical body dies while her consciousness is trapped in the Net. In that moment Alt evolves from human being into an AI, with its own cryptic reasons. Only through that transformation she as a character escapes her gender role, becoming something else than human. She rises above objectification when she is no longer physical. In a way Alt is recentered into her virtual version in order to be able to exist beyond the Blackwall where the rogue AIs are supposed to be contained, in yet another possible world.

During the quest “Transmission” V with the help of netrunner Brigitte attempts to contact Alt. The process of metalepsis is given its visual representation as red digital models of characters move through the dark blue space that indicates travelling deeper into the cyberspace. During this scene Brigitte says: “Beyond, there are no borders. Beyond the Blackwall. Few have gone through to the other side. And none have yet returned. She will be the first”

(*Cyberpunk 2077*). In the cyberspace V and Johnny ultimately talk with Alt in her new form. This virtual version of her still looks female, speaks with her voice yet is bereft of feelings. For instance, she discloses the nature of the possible world of Johnny's memories witnessed by V and the player: "What you saw was his subjective view of what happened. A warped account of events he locked away in his subconscious and replayed time and again" (*Cyberpunk 2077*). Being able to witness a story set in a possible world due to the technology available in the storyworld is what Marie-Laure Ryan describes as "virtual narration" (2001: 164). In *Cyberpunk 2077* cyberspace is a possible world to and from which those with the adequate skill set and technology might enter and exit while it remains populated by AIs which are beings alien to humans. Transgressing boundaries between worlds allows them to influence each other. It is made possible by a specific technology, the users' cognitive properties and the ability to navigate through the different levels of a narrative structure.

While for the characters it is crucial to be familiar with the technological inventory of the storyworld, for the player it is essential to navigate across the Night City and its surrounding desert regions using the map, and across the narrative of *Cyberpunk 2077*, following the quests, both main quests and side quests. Michał Kłosiński confirms that in video games map "serves to navigate the character in the game world" (2018: 78). The player can take a look at the minimap during gameplay and open a larger map in the pause menu, in order to check the exact location of quests and possible interactive encounters, for instance with various vendors, such as ripperdocs, who might install V helpful cybernetic augmentations. Kłosiński concludes that "the map in games exists at the intersection of the player's actual world and the world of virtual entities" (2018: 94). Through the ability to understand the map, the player is able to cognitively traverse the virtual plane. The map is a tool which facilitates immersion, and the process of playful recentering. While reaching the edge of the map, the immersion might be broken due to the following text appearing on the screen: "Turn back. Nothin' out there for you... Just yet"

(*Cyberpunk 2077*). Nevertheless, the map gives no reason for escaping its limits because all the elements of the virtual world are contained within. *Cyberpunk 2077*'s map is extensive and packed with accordingly justified activities keeping the player immersed, while limits of the map remain out of perceptual reach. It is extensive to a point where the possible worlds can be disclosed within its limits. Night City is surrounded by deserts occupied by specific factions, while the urban area only gleams in the distance as if remaining a hallucination or a hologram. In that moment the city and the space around it might be perceived as two separate worlds, as it may be observed in the case of *Transmetropolitan*'s storyworld. Furthermore, "map implicates spatial awareness, atmosphere, threat, motion and touch, through visual power synesthesia" (Kłosiński 2018: 86). In that manner, the map in *Cyberpunk 2077*, includes different icons for the main quests, the side quests, the gigs, which provide additional income, vendors, criminal activity, and so on. Noticing a particular icon takes advantage of more than just one sense, so the map enables the player to be more immersed in the storyworld, cognitively synthesizing the possible worlds placed in various separate locations.

Cyberpunk 2077 provides the narrative structure for its virtual space through the system of quests which the player can monitor on the map, and in the special log in the pause interface. The narrative in an open world game might be non-linear, forking, while, some of its elements might even be skippable. Espen Aarseth observes that "the top-down, narrative intentions of the scenario designers are subject to the bottom-up laws of the simulation" (2004: 372). The effect of the gameplay mechanics, the structure of the virtual space, and the interactive narrative, is a world the player experiences. The time spent in the storyworld of *Cyberpunk 2077* depends on the player's selection of activities. The game might be completed just by following the main questline; however, the optional side quests alter it and affect the ending of the whole game. Some side quests introduce V to developed and multi-layered NPCs that can become his/her friends or love interests, depending on the player's choices. Characters such as Judy Alvarez,

Panam Palmer or Kerry Eurodyne are met as a result of following the main questline, yet V is able to develop the relationship with them only by completing the proper set of side quests. As Marie-Laure Ryan observes “much effort has been recently devoted by game designers to involve players in emotion rich situations” (2022: 170). In *Cyberpunk 2077* NPCs with their own set of side quests work in favor of emotional immersion. They are complex characters that exist in the specific part of this storyworld and have actual influence on it. When V is in a relationship with them they can send him/her text messages and make phone calls. Furthermore, in *Cyberpunk 2077* there are four endings to the main storyline, plus a fifth available with the DLC Phantom Liberty. The available choice of endings vary due to the side quests completed by the player prior to starting one of the final quests of the main storyline – “Nocturne Op55N1”. Sebastian Domsch observes this structure of quests in video games such as *Fallout: New Vegas* or *Skyrim*, in which “quests that are optional for the completion of the main quest chain can nevertheless influence the way that the latter plays out” (2013: 88). As a result of the completed side quests the player ends up with V in the particular textual actual world at the end of the main storyline. The quest “Nocturne Op55N1” is linear to a point where V has to choose if he/she wants any help in penetrating Mikoshi, Arasaka’s databank, with digital consciousnesses obtained with the use of Soullkiller, in order to upload artificial intelligence, Alt into the corporation’s closed system.

The ending of *Cyberpunk 2077* is affected by the player’s narrative choices, while the outcome resolves around the question of human physicality and its relationship with the virtual world, which is one of the recurring themes in the cyberpunk genre, connected with transhumanism that “is all about transcendence” (Grillmayr 2020: 273). As in the case of Bob Arctor in *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), V’s personality is split, however not because of the drug use, but due to the presence of a hostile consciousness of Johnny Silverhand. V and Johnny might become friends; however, their relationship exists solely in the non-corporeal possible

world of the mind. In the textual actual world only one consciousness can remain in V's body. Grillmayr points out that "the question of (dis)embodiment proves to be a key site of inquiry for both the posthuman project and cyberpunk" (2020: 275). The multiple endings of *Cyberpunk 2077* offer a virtual, narrative environment to study this particular issue. It is possible to make V choose to remain in her/his body and leave Night City with her/his new family; however, with the threat of death still looming over because V's body has been too damaged to survive. V can leave his/her body to Johnny Silverhand deliberately and join Alt in the cyberspace, becoming immortalized in a virtual possible world, or, playing as Johnny Silverhand the player might choose the opposite, thus becoming a legendary mercenary in Night City and letting Johnny enter the cyberspace. V might also help the Arasaka corporation and become a part of the consciousness database stored in Mikoshi. There are some variations to these option, and each set results in a different textual actual world, in which V's choices affect his/her body, relationships, and the surrounding world in a different way. Each option is ambiguous and corresponds to the idea that "cyberpunk takes up the streamlined, utopian visions of transhumanism, but complicates or contradicts them tremendously" (Grillmayr 2020: 276).

In conclusion, video games prove to be a medium that is exceptionally fit to disclose a complex storyworld that can be described as a hyperreality. In order to enter such a hyperreality the player has to learn the rules of the game and allow herself/himself to be immersed. *Cyberpunk 2077* offers an open world experience that is rich in various kinds of immersion, spatial, emotional and ludic. While playing the game its storyworld becomes actual for the player who's focus is recentered into V's. The narrative is forking, while it depends on the player's choices which narrative path is to be made actual. Within this extensive storyworld one might distinguish various units, depending on the chosen scope of interest and the narrative path. Finally, aligning with the principal of minimal departure, the storyworld of *Cyberpunk 2077*, is set very closely to the actual world in the 2020s. Obviously some of its inventory

elements are still out of reach in the actual world; however, because of the rapid technological development, the possible world of *Cyberpunk 2077*'s hyperreality appears to be getting closer to the contemporary actual reality each day hence engaging in it becomes more natural.

Chapter 6

THE JANUARY 6 SIEGE OF THE U.S CAPITOL

The final chapter regards the analysis of the recorded event from the actual world, presented through an intricately composed website. The event in question has already been labeled as *January 6 Siege of The U.S Capitol*, *January 6 United States Capitol attack* (Wikipedia), or *January 6 U.S Capitol Attack* (Brittanica). I have decided to focus on it because it occurred three years ago from the moment I write this chapter, and it took place on a different continent from the one I am currently in. The time and space barriers force me as a receiver to approach the attack on the U.S Capitol through the available media. Furthermore, as a narrative it includes multiple characteristics that define the cyberpunk genre. However, before I will proceed with my analysis of the event as a part of an immersive narrative, coherently structured with the use of digital media, I am going to discuss on what basis it is thought to be ‘actual’, and whether it can be perceived as something else as well.

The attack on the U.S capitol took place on January 6, in the year two thousand twenty one. Such a statement is regarded as true, concerning the actual reality, the larger totality, the storyworld. It can be true as a fact, because “the possibility of a proposition representing a fact rests upon the fact that in it objects are represented by signs” (Russell 2010: 10). In Ludwig Wittgenstein’s terminology it is a factual statement composed of another state of affairs, made of signs. Further, for Wittgenstein “the world is the totality of facts, not of things” (Wittgenstein 1922: 25). Facts refer to each other, thus allowing us to assess if a statement is true. Such optics on the matter confirm the classical correspondence theory of truth, which the advocate of modal logic, David Lewis, calls “vacuous” (2001: 277). Instead he turns to the truthmaker principle which can be stated as follows: “For every truth there is a truthmaker; for every true proposition there exists something such that the existence of that thing implies (strictly? relevantly?) the proposition in question” (Lewis 2001: 277). For a fact not to be vacuous it has to be confirmed

as a referential part of a larger structure of facts that constitute a world. Moreover, factual events, such as the January 6 attack on the U.S capitol are recorded in the memory of various individuals as well as on digital devices. The event is no longer physical yet it has left its mark, the physical imprint. The cognitive ability to draw conclusions from the past events, to connect the dots, makes the imagination uphold the idea of the realness of the past, which is a mental construct. That ability allows humans to comprehend the reality they occupy. Albert Einstein writes, following Immanuel Kant, that comprehensibility implies

the production of some sort of order among sense impressions, this order being produced by the creation of general concepts, relations between these concepts, and by relations between the concepts and sense experience, these relations being determined in any possible manner. It is in this sense that the world of our sense experiences is comprehensible. The fact that it is comprehensible is a miracle. (1936: 351)

The complex net of concepts and experiences, facts and fictions is formed in order to place a human being in a specific place and time, in a stable, comprehensible storyworld. Being able to function in a world means to be able to piece together a comprehensible image of a world, one fit to be named ‘actual’. To exist in the actual world is to obey the strict rules it is governed by; hence classical physics are still of essence today. The chronological time flow and the space organized by set laws of physics are real once a human accepts the rules which establish them as real. They constitute the states of being and becoming, the dynamic between them, however only to reassure Being, in a singular, specific time and space as actual.

In order to move around the limited physical surroundings with the help of senses a human has to agree on a stable state of being, while to provide a context to what is beyond, the state of becoming has to be acknowledged simultaneously. In a similar fashion Charles T. Sebens proposes a theory that may bring classical physics and quantum physics together:

Once we realize that Newtonian QM is a viable way of understanding nonrelativistic quantum mechanics, we see that we never needed to overthrow Newtonian mechanics with a quantum revolution. One can formulate quantum mechanics in terms of point particles interacting via Newtonian forces. The mysterious wave function is merely a way of summarizing the properties of particles, not a piece of fundamental reality. (2015: 289).

Following this theory, the classical concept of time and space might be applied to look more favorably on quantum mechanics and many-worlds ontology. Hence an actual event such as the January 6 attack on U.S capitol can be approached dually. Firstly, as an event that happened in a specific time in the past, in a particular place on Earth. Secondly, it might be perceived as a distinct, non-corporeal possible world, separated by time and space, while still remaining a part of the storyworld. In order to approach such an event the individual has to rely on media through which a non-corporeal form is condensed into a coherent form, a narrative world. Correspondingly, fictional worlds are meticulously structured to immerse their audience, readers, players, receivers or users. Structuring an event to resemble a fictional world or a fictional narrative offers a space to give voice to multiple characters, acknowledging their diversity, what is parallel with Jean-Francois Lyotard's concept of paralogy.

Postmodern philosophers, such as Lyotard and Baudrillard, noticed how a world can be a fragmented phenomenon, while narratives that take place within it can be detected. Jacques Derrida proposed deconstruction as a means to expose hidden meanings in narratives. This method induces critical thinking that might be applied to observing contemporary storytelling strategies, and the ways audiences are immersed. In the book *Screened Out*, Jean Baudrillard claims that “video, interactive screens, multimedia, the Internet, virtual reality — we are threatened on all sides by interactivity. What was separated in the past is now everywhere merged” (2002: 176). The philosopher transfers his idea of hyperreality onto digital media and

the images they create, stating that they lead to the destruction of a barrier between scene and spectators, which results in stripping an actual event “of its historical dimension and removing it from memory” (2002: 176). Baudrillard perceives this order of things as eventually one causing panic among the users because of the inability to distinguish real from fictional. This perspective might as well be slightly shifted in order to notice that the “historical dimension” (2002: 176) is a relative term, used to support the realness of a particular storyworld. When a historical text is presented through digital media it becomes more immersive. Thus an individual experiencing it understands more of nuanced elements, for instance characters’ motivations. Baudrillard fears that “at any rate, as soon as you are in front of the screen, you no longer see the text as text, but as image. Now, it is in the strict separation of text and screen, of text and image, that writing is an activity in its own right — never an interaction” (2002: 177). However, writing can be perceived as both. Roland Barthes emphasizes “the performative nature of any literary or linguistic utterance, with the Author being a product of the interplay among competing discourses and conventions” (Siegle 1983: 128). The desired effect of communing with a text is a totally immersive image that for a time replaces the actual reality of its reader or writer. As Marie Laure Ryan observes “immersion is an experience, an imaginative state, that can be triggered by any medium; you can be ‘lost in a book’ as well as immersed in a computer game” (2022: 168). In this fashion novels stimulate the imagination with syntactic compositions, films play with the sense of vision and hearing, comics combine sings and images, while video games make it possible for their users to interact with the virtual environment. Every image of a world presented through the media is evoked by specific factors, and in order to comprehend it its users support it with a distinct narrative structure. It allows them to navigate around the certain world and also to compare it with other worlds. Hayden White advocates that,

it is the historians themselves who have transformed narrativity from a manner of speaking into a paradigm of the form which reality itself displays to a “realistic” consciousness. It is they who have made narrativity into a value, the presence of which in a discourse having to do with real events signals at once its objectivity, its seriousness, and its realism. (1980: 27).

In order to become more understandable historical narratives have to consist of literary properties. The same is true for any kind of real account. It is assessed as real through its relations to other facts within the storyworld, although before that it has to be composed out of particular narrative elements.

Composing an immersive, informative world that acquires the status of ‘actual’ is what journalism is all about. It is also of interest to me as it is a method of collecting worldmaking elements by the means of reporting, so that at one point an individual is there, in the middle of an event, in a physical sense, and then the same individual employs memories and impression as well as digitally recorded evidence of that event to construct a world through chosen media. When it comes to theory, journalism is by definition multidisciplinary:

journalism covers and shapes all aspects of society, from politics to fashion, from business to everyday life. It influences, articulates, and produces culture. It is the first draft of history, and it is where history can be found. Journalism is language, rhetoric, genres, and discourse. It is legitimized and limited by law. It is in industry, civil society, and the state. It is labor, it is management; it is commercial, nonprofit and idealistic. Journalism is technology. It is media and communication. It is local and global. It is about ethics. Journalism is epistemic, as it produces knowledge about the world. (Ahva and Steensen 2020: 38).

Hence journalism can be many things at once it appears to be a promising ground to study the everchanging borderline between fact and fiction. As the perspective on what journalism is shifts according to how it is practiced and received, the perspective of what is actual may shift as well. Through reporting a physical moment it becomes history, an account of a reality, rather than the reality. Nevertheless, by reading such an account a reader forms a reality out of it, and piece it together as a part of her/his actual world. Viewed by semiotics a text created by a journalist is a product of various media: “The field of semiotics, in which text is understood as not only written language, but also as still and moving images, body language, and so on, has been important in recognizing journalism as visual culture and discussing the diversity through which journalism produces meaning” (Ahva and Steensen 2020: 47). Through the use of multiple media, meanings produced by journalism not only are more diverse; they are also presented more precisely; hence they function in a narrative context or in a world structure. Journalists organize texts although they quite often do it from within, as participants, characters of their own worlds. One of the approaches to journalism theory “implies that theoretical constructs are constantly negotiated by empirical material” (Ahva and Steensen 2020: 49). A unified theory defining journalism cannot be pinpointed as its practitioners take on multiple functions concerning their texts. A journalist can be a writer, a reporter, a character, and a theoretician, changing roles along the way. Through that journey she/he enters and constructs worlds which are later compared, combined and separated by their readers. A kind of journalist who functions as a fictional character is a gonzo journalist, such as Hunter S. Thompson, or, in his futuristic version from *Transmetropolitan* comics series, Spider Jerusalem. In his essay James E. Caron compares Hunter S. Thompson to Mark Twain, claiming that “for both writers, facts are just so much cord-wood fuel for the imagination” (1985 :1). Thompson and Twain used elements they had observed in their actual worlds to construct their texts, their own worlds, which may be assessed as realistic applying accessibility relations and the principal of minimal

departure. It is an activity required of the reader. Furthermore, the writings of Hunter S. Thompson in some aspects can be defined as New Journalism:

The essence of Tom Wolfe's New Journalism is that reporting can have an aesthetic dimension. Using techniques usually associated with novels and short stories, a writer can produce lively and interesting non-fiction without sacrificing accuracy, he asserts. This kind of non-fiction often demands that the reporter spend days or even weeks with an assignment in order to absorb all the details. Only then, Wolfe argues, can the subjective or emotional life of the people involved in the story be rendered, providing "the full objective description." The rendering of this internal part of the reporter's assignment requires fictional techniques and gives rise to the aesthetic dimension—the literary side—claimed as the new part of New Journalism. (Caron 1985: 1).

New Journalism maintains a bridge between fact and fiction, in order to simplify it for the reader who estimates what is actual and what is not. This journalism movement accepts the necessity of using literary techniques to create an immersive account of an event, one with depth of a world and an engaging narrative flow. It does not, however, embrace the idea that mediating an actual event fictionalizes it in the process. Later the receiver who is recentered during interaction with the text has to ascribe its properties to her/his storyworld image. A Gonzo journalist does not dare to make this distinction for the reader: "Thompson can become the hero of his own story. Since what the 'I' feels and thinks about the events or people being covered is necessarily known only to the author, imagination can replace memory as the only guide for those thoughts and feelings" (Caron 1985: 2). Both imagination and memory are mental constructs that influence each other heavily and constantly so that one might distort the other. Accepting this complex relationship leads to a more thorough and human description of an event. Then a journalistic report becomes a possible world capable of representing the fractured human psyche; a world which can be explored using the developed reading skill its receiver

should have. Hunter S. Thompson formed his possible worlds on paper, the old fashioned way. In the storyworld of *Transmetropolitan*, Thompson's counterpart, Spider Jerusalem had cyberpunk inventory at his disposal to do the same. In the actual world, which keeps changing into a cyberpunk reality, digital media influence the ways journalism is practiced: the technological perspective has brought entirely new theoretical input to the field. For instance, "science and technology studies is one of the most important new fields to have influenced theorization of journalism in the digital age" (Ahva and Steensen 2020: 48). Digital media such as the Internet, recorded visuals or sound work miracles in unifying a stable, coherent storyworld. Nevertheless, they are still storytelling tools, and without skillful manipulation an image of a world they present would not exist. Online journalists are distinguished by "the particular cybernetic and informationalist epistemology in which they define their expertise" (Boyer 2010: 82). They are aware of the possibilities of the medium they use so they construct their texts in a specific fashion; the texts are further disseminated across the Internet, a non-corporeal, virtual space.

The Internet is a collection of paratexts to the actual world, a separate virtual world or a passageway to other possible worlds. As a passageway it contains of many doors: webpages and hyperlinks. Alice Bell begins her text on digital fictionality with the following observation:

Digital technology has allowed narrative experimentation to expand beyond the page and into an entire network of linked media. Hypertext provides a structure within which chunks of text can be connected in both linear and multilinear configurations; the web, as an ever-expanding hypertext system, allows digital texts to be linked to other digital texts, both fictional and nonfictional. (2019: 249)

Through the capacities of an online article a journalist gains new methods of ordering gathered, experiential elements, applying particular storytelling techniques. A website article can be intermedial as it consists of videos, sound recordings and most importantly links to other pages.

Bell focuses on digital fictions, noticing that “their engagement with the actual world is not just cognitive, conceptual, or thematic but also, via external hyperlinks, material” (2019: 268-269). In a corresponding fashion a journalistic report in the form of a website reassures its receivers of its actuality because it exists within a network of other texts. Therefore, an adequately prepared contemporary reader knows how to cognitively operate this kind of medium and its texts. First an image of a possible world emerges from arranging the words, signs, images and sounds. Next comes the judgment whether to ascribe that image into the image of the storyworld that surrounds the reader. Regardless of the decision, the world image that appeared in imagination while interacting with a webpage remains a mental construct, coherently ordered by the user’s senses and by the ability to be recentered into fictional worlds.

The January 6 siege of the U.S Capitol was reported by the Washington Post and composed into a extensive website article. Furthermore,

the staff of The Washington Post has won the 2022 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for its coverage of the January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol. The Post’s coverage of the causes, costs and aftermath of the attack showed how the forces behind the siege are shaking the underpinnings of democracy. (WashPostPR 2022)

The digital, intermedial account of the physical event received a major award that legitimized and confirmed its thoroughness and complexity. The coverage entitled *The Attack: Before, During, After*, is an immersive narrative experience that produces a hyperreal image of a cyberpunk world which through legitimization by existing in a network of texts may become a part of the actual world.

It opens with a title presented on a background of a photo that shows the U.S Capitol building swarmed by protesters with banners endorsing president Donald Trump. The website at first is black, while the lettering remains white, which indicates the ominous message of the

text. The physical activity required of the reader is to scroll, point and click. For a person familiar with the Internet as a medium it is a natural way of navigating through its texts. The Washington Post's *The Attack: Before, During, After*, as a text is an intermedial endeavor; therefore the initial photograph is followed by a short textual summary of what the presented story will concern: "It was a battle in a broader war over the truth and over the future of American democracy" (The Washington Post 2022). It introduces the reader to the subject and it also paints the imaginary picture of the world it considers. The reader who is detached from the described events by time and space, commences reading by forming an image of a world, a mental construct. At this point it does not differ from reading fiction. Alice Bell analyses the digital text concerning rape in the actual world, *We Are Angry*, and comes to the conclusion that it "exists somewhere in between the nonfictional and fictional poles. In using a first-person account that is verified with a combination of fictional and authentic documents, the reader is asked to accept the narrator's account as viable" (2019: 267). *We Are Angry* creates its own world, which, however, includes some elements that are assessed as actual, because of the hyperlinks that point to websites describing the actual storyworld. Furthermore, she claims that *We Are Angry* upholds the doctrine of panfictionality "in which fiction and nonfiction are seen as indistinguishable because of their reliance on the same modes of representation" (Bell 2019: 267). Accounts of actual events mediated in various ways, distanced from its reader by time and space, follow a similar pattern. They might be perceived dually: Firstly, as a distinct possible world with its own inventory and characters. Secondly, because they function in a network of other texts they can be granted a status of being actual, that is concerning the surrounding storyworld. Marie-Laure Ryan acknowledged that "thanks to the postmodern critique, we are now better aware that texts of nonfiction display an image distinct from their reference world, and that the construction of this image deserves consideration" (1997: 180). The contemporary actual world demands much more of its readers as it offers an abundance of

immersive texts (fictional, non-fictional and actual), presented through a variety of media. All kinds of texts that create a certain world image to which a reader is recentered deserve an evaluation of the structure and the media they employ, while disclosing them as actual is a subsidiary activity.

In order to evoke an image of a coherent world *The Attack: Before, During, After* maintains the structure of a literary text as it is divided into three chapters. They are organized chronologically so the reader observes causes and results. The introduction to the following chapters contains the section entitled “Key characters” (The Washington Post 2021). Those key figures are not just characters but their actions and emotions as well: “A president’s provocation, A congresswoman’s fears, A first responder’s trauma, A state official’s anger” (The Washington Post 2021). Emotions and actions stand for the characters whose names are revealed in the text below and whose photos are shown next to the text. This way of character presentation serves to place them for the reader in the specific spot in the textual actual world and it emphasizes the emotions they felt and actions they took. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen and Thomas R. Schmidt write that,

emotionality serves a crucial role in journalistic narratives. Scholarship has established that journalists deliberately and strategically craft emotionally engaging narratives because they facilitate audience engagement and understanding (Peters, 2011). Audiences appear to connect with concrete stories of lived experience which dramatize the large and often abstract events of which news is made. (2020 :264)

An in-depth depiction of an individual existing within a presented world provides the reader with an essential vessel, a focalizer to traverse it. In the introduction to *The Attack: Before, During, After*, characters are only sketched, which indicates that they shall be developed later in the text.

The first chapter is appropriately entitled “Red Flags” (The Washington Post 2021). Scrolling down the website the reader notices a timeline positioned in the left upper corner. It visualizes how many days are left to go until the attack. In this manner the text is given a clear narrative structure that fluently guides the reader across the presented world and the narrative. The beginning of the first paragraph includes the name of one of the key characters, Donell Harvin, in bold. He functions as one of the homodiegetic focalizers. Pointing at his name reveals his occupation “as the head intelligence at D.C” (The Washington Post 2021), and his role in the following story. The initial part of this chapter is composed as a summary, yet it opens with Harvin’s perspective on the events of January 6th. Harvin is the face of the “Red Flags” chapter, as he “was one of numerous people inside and outside of government who alerted authorities to the growing likelihood of deadly violence on Jan. 6” (The Washington Post 2021). The world he acts in is a chaotic one where the authorities are not able to keep up with the threat from the inside, a threat with its own virtual shadow. The initial fragments also paint the imaginary picture of Donald Trump, as a manipulative figure, who exerts a specific kind of control over the world he exists in: “Trump primed his base to view Pence as either a would-be hero or villain, depending on the path the vice president took” (The Washington Post 2021). Trump is not merely a character in this story; he is its creator as well. He decides if other characters, such as Mike Pence, are to be viewed as villains or as heroes. Within the world of the Washington Post coverage he operates on the macroscale, similar to how *The Smiler* functioned in *Transmetropolitan*’s storyworld. Observing Trump’s multiple roles in that narrative is possible because the medium, an online article, allows its reader to form a coherent world image that takes into account diverse perspectives. Trump’s character representation is completed by suggestive photographs of his marching supporters, one of them wearing a shirt with the president’s faces and a necklace with a cross, and a video that shows Donald Trump, giving his

opinion on Mike Pence in front of the crowd. Trump is the axis of the world presented in this coverage. His multiple roles within the narrative sew elements of the story together.

The countdown of days until the eponymous attack starts from one hundred and two days: “The violent events of Jan. 6 had been months in the making” (The Washington Post 2021). This quote confirms that the presented narrative has its specific time frames. When the time dimension of this world is established, the reader is introduced to its virtual plane, a possible world that is parallel with the textual actual world. The virtual world consists of videos of the presidential campaign, and a conservative social media network Parler, among other online sources. *The Attack: Before, During, After* applies them as elements of the narrative, thus they constitute the textual actual world. Videos and photos

may admittedly be manipulated, in which case they will not give a reliable testimony of the existence of their referent or of its presence in a certain place at a certain time. A manipulated photo or film is the equivalent of a lie in language, unless the manipulation is meant to be recognized. But it is precisely the ability to make truth-functional statements that make it possible for a type of signs to either lie, tell the truth....or be used as fiction. (Ryan 2010: 16)

Photos and videos are components that build a world representation. They cognitively work together with the text to evoke specific representation in reader’s mind. When it comes to photos and their footnotes the mechanism employed to understand their message is comparable to reading comics. The videos on the other hand allow the reader to juxtapose an image of the textual actual world that had emerged from language, “Trump said, “Proud Boys, stand back and stand by.” (The Washington Post 2021), with its counterpart in an audiovisual form. As a result there appears a world image formed out of cognition, imagination and perception. Further, it is updated with the entries from Parler, where Enrique Tario, the leader of the Proud Boys, responded to the president’s words.

Social media networks create unique virtual spaces that are constantly evolving thanks to the input of their users. Ruth Page argues that “the participatory culture typical of stories told in web 2.0 contexts require an enriched model of interactivity where the individual’s manipulation of the textual interface and story content are complimented by analysis of factors in the surrounding discursive context” (2010: 228). The creators of the coverage used a fragment of the virtual space relevant to the narrative they were constructing. As a result both gained something; the coverage has become more complex and multimodal, while the online discourse has been provided with an additional context. In order to navigate the presented world an intermedial approach is required, while the cyberpunk inventory of this world is being revealed simultaneously. It is a fragmented world, composed of possible worlds and of characters that may transgress the boundaries between them.

Donald Trump operates on the macroscale in the textual actual world because he wields power as the President and because he can be perceived as a fictional, almost cartoonish entity. While each immersive text can become a hyperreality for its recentered reader, certain hyperreality indicators appear in the actual world as well. An example of the place that indicates the existence of hyperreality, as provided by Jean Baudrillard, is Disneyland, where fictional characters walk among the visitors of the theme park. An example of an individual indicating a hyperreal order is Donald Trump himself. Henry Jenkins asked “who would have imagined that Donald Trump could emerge as a populist spokesman?” (2006: 206). In the actual world Trump was known from the popular TV show, *The Apprentice* (2004). His image established in that show was used to create a video criticizing George W. Bush, the U.S president at the time. Trump as a character transgressed the boundaries between his reality TV show and the actual world. Eventually he himself became the President, with the help of his fictional characteristics. The reality made a full circle. Donald Trump retains the properties of a transgressive character observed in the past account of the actual world, and in the textual actual world of the

Washington Post's coverage. His existence indicates a hyperreality in which other characters have to survive.

Among those oppressed individuals are Donnell Harvin, and Paul Hodgkins, “a 38-year-old crane operator, captivated by the president’s encouragement” (The Washington Post 2021). Hodgkins is one of the protesters who barged into the Capitol on January 6th, and he is a character that exists on the opposite pole of Donald Trump because he represents the microscale of the textual actual world. He is a fleshed-out character with a particular set of motivations: “To a man who felt that the homeownership his parents had achieved would always be out of reach, Trump’s ‘Make America Great Again’ slogan had struck a chord” (The Washington Post 2021). The depiction of Paul Hodgkins is supported by the suggestive photos of him smiling during rallies for Trump. He is the reader’s man on the inside, someone who is grounded in the specific time and space in the particular world. His actions remain encompassed in those distinct frames; however, they are influenced and reshaped by the involuntary hyperreality represented by Donald Trump and by the virtual world.

The hyperreality of the textual actual world emerges because its cyberpunk inventory allows it. This inventory consists of Internet-based practices such as social media networks and live streams: “Days before the march, Rhodes appeared at a Stop the Steal rally in Northern Virginia. Live-streaming the event on the Oath Keepers’ YouTube channel, Rhodes told the audience that Trump supporters ‘must declare that Joe Biden is not ... anyone’s president. He’s a usurper.” (The Washington Post 2021). Through live streams the time distance between a world and its receiver is abolished, and the distance of space is put in question, while the events presented in them are happening right in front of the receiver’s eyes. Therefore the process of making an experience of such a world hyperreal takes place in a blink of an eye. Colin Milburn observes that the use of cyberpunk inventory might have positive outcomes:

The Macintosh advertisement suggested that individuals armed with the right technology could resist or subvert the forces of dystopian control, whether totalitarian governments or corporate monopolies. The Macintosh user—a spry athlete wielding a tactical hammer—liberates the multitudes from the domination of Big Brother: a powerful fable perfectly attuned to the technocultural conditions of its time (Friedman 102–20). It affirmed the idea that, although the world was rapidly transforming through computerization, savvy users could still intervene, reshaping things to come. (2020: 373)

People who are fluently using technology in the digital age are competent to reshape it for the better. They can resist oppression effectively and oppose through cyberspace. The access to technology in a cyberpunk world is however unlimited, which simultaneously raises hopes and threats. In *The Attack: Before, During, After*'s textual actual world right wing activists used it for their own means. In effect they stirred up the public, which resulted in the major civil disturbance: “Inside Capitol Police headquarters, officials beefed up numbers of available patrol officers and made plans to station civil disturbance units — which use shields, helmets and other protective crowd-control gear — along the east side of the Capitol, where protesters were expected” (The Washington Post 2021). This textual actual world discloses a dystopian reality in compliance with how other cyberpunk narratives describe their realities. In that dystopian environment exist characters with emotions and fears. There is Donnel Harvin, an intelligence director, Clint Hickman, Maricopa County Supervisor, Paul Hodginks, a crane operator, and Capt. Carneysha Mendoza “a former soldier known for arriving at the office as early as 3 a.m. to run flights of stairs” (The Washington Post 2021). Her perspective as well as Hodgins’ allows the reader to be recentered into a particular individual’s focus. She took part in violent protests on November 14th, and her account is formed out of a written narrative, her text messages with

date and time stamp, and videos that display fighting in the streets. All that transforms Mendoza's reality into the reader's hyperreality for the time of the reading.

On December 12th another rally in favor of overthrowing the election results was organized in Washington D.C. Its depiction includes the perspective of the congresswoman Liz Cheney who "couldn't believe what she was seeing. Her thoughts flashed forward to Jan. 6, and she started to fear just how far Trump's most avid supporters might go. Cheney imagined a bomb threat halting the count to certify the election" (The Washinton Post 2021). Once again an insider point of view functions in favor of emotional immersion. The sense of spatial immersion is evoked by the meaningful photos of Trump and his supporters, while the narrative immersion is more effective because there is an adequate Trump's Twitter entry attached: "Wow! Thousands of people forming in Washington (D.C.) for Stop the Steal. Didn't know about this, but I'll be seeing them! #MAGA" (The Washington Post 2021). The rise of narrative tension is signaled by sentences such as the following: "With nightfall came chaos" (The Washington Post 2021). It is a very specific form of storytelling: use of literary techniques, various characters' accounts, and inclusion of other media. It builds up a diverse world image in the center of which the eventual attack will take place.

The final thirty eight hours part of the chapter shifts back to Paul Hodgkins's point of view, the micro scaled world: "On Jan. 5, Hodgkins got off work in Tampa around 12:30 a.m. He'd slept only a couple of hours when he got up, collected his bag and a red Trump flag on a pole, and left for the bus terminal in Sarasota" (The Washinton Post 2021). On the other pole, the chapter "Red Flags" ends with the macroscale world of Donald Trump: "For nine weeks, the coda to Trump's presidency had blared like a siren song. His false claims of election fraud had lured followers to act on their worst instincts. A wave of them had come to Washington, and more were on the way" (The Washington Post 2021). The first chapter of the coverage constructs its textual actual world around the numerous perspectives of its characters, enabling

its readers to fill in the blanks by looking at the particular events with the eyes of the people who were there; in this fashion reading becomes a hyperreal experience.

The central chapter of the coverage is entitled “Bloodshed”. The title is presented on the black background and next to a large picture that discloses people covering their faces with American flag and masks. That indicates the dark tone of the narrative to come. Once again the time frame is established: “For 187 harrowing minutes, the president watched his supporters attack the Capitol — and resisted pleas to stop them” (The Washington Post 2021). At this point the coverage reads as a thriller, in which every second counts. The pawns are set in the right places, the reader is introduced to the textual actual world, hence the game begins. The properties of a thriller story are of use here because through them the negative feelings of the characters are exposed. Regarding the historical narratives Hayden White claimed that “without a narrativization of the facts in question, the facts can never yield that combination of truth and meaning that is the aim of every properly historical reconstruction” (2022, Introduction). The same goes for a journalist coverage that creates an image of a world through reader’s imagination, and then guides her/him through it maintaining a cohesive narrative. Further in the Washington Post’s text it is stated that: “An investigation by The Washington Post provides the richest understanding to date of Trump’s mindset and the cost of his inaction as democracy came under attack” (2021). Direct statements such as this are immersive breaking, yet their function well when the reader decides to add the information from the text into set of information he/she considers actual, describing the actual reality.

Getting right back into the textual actual world of January 6th, the reader is prompted to feel worried as Donnel Harvin and Liz Chaney “anticipated the potential for danger” (The Washington Post 2021). The scene of the events turns into a cyberpunk image of a dystopian society. The diverse crowd of Trump’s supporters presented in the video is calling for a fight. Some of them are equipped as if they were walking the streets of the fictional Night City, from

Cyberpunk 2077 (2020): “At 8:06 a.m., an internal Secret Service alert said that roughly 10,000 people were waiting to go through magnetometers and some were ‘wearing ballistic helmets, body armor and carrying radio equipment and military-grade backpacks” (The Washington Post 2021). The coverage includes the sound recordings of police dispatches that strategically placed in the text serve the efficient storytelling. Photos and videos present people climbing the trees, holding phones. Contemporary cameras record certain points of view, which than can be perceived as possible worlds, as was the case in Richard Linklater’s film, *A Scanner Darkly* (2006).

One of the attached pictures shows the man who is wearing a furry hat with horns, has a painted face and is screaming. That figure appears as if taken out of a whole another fictional world, a fantastical one. This man is another hyperreality indicator. His presence as well as the existence of Disneyland suggest that the surrounding world and its contents are “no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation” (Baudrillard 1994: 10). Hyperreality is, however, absolute and cannot be compromised so the man with horns is an inherent part of the textual actual world even if he is out of place. In that world armed crowds storm the U.S capitol, spectators film the occurrence with their phones, while the whole event is fueled by the invisible possible world, a counterpart of *Neuromancer’s* cyberspace, the Internet and Donald Trump’s tweets: “States want to correct their votes, which they now know were based on irregularities and fraud, plus corrupt process never received legislative approval. All Mike Pence has to do is send them back to the States, AND WE WIN. Do it Mike, this is a time for extreme courage!” (The Washington Post 2021). Trump’s voice is coming out of the virtual realm; yet it manages to rattle up individuals in the physical realm. As in a cyberpunk narrative the textual actual world of the January 6th coverage is heavily influenced by the digital possible world.

When the narrative approaches the point when the crowds enter the capitol the text is accompanied by the map of the building and the nearby areas. For the reader the map is a tool that aids in navigating around the presented world. Referring to Alistair Bonnet and J.B Harley, Michał Kłosiński notes that “the map is a basic element of a developed process of changing place into space, spatial planning, with all accompanying mechanisms: power, control, pressure, transformation, and of course, habitation” (2018: 77). The map that comes with the text provides its creators with an additional capacity to set the characters on a grid, to manage the described world applying a perspective of the map, which puts specific frames on the spatial dimension of the textual actual world. The reader receives another reading tool, an epistemological device that helps to imagine the space described by the text, and to fill it with meaning. On the map the reader observes that Donald Trump was giving his speech in a place located some distance from where the protesters had been gathering. The crowds therefore were stimulated to fight in his name through a digital medium, remotely. Trump remained safe while conveying his possible world through non-corporeal channels. The map visualizes the relationship between textual actual world and its possible worlds thus the reader combines them into a storyworld and maneuvers more fluently between different characters and their points of view.

The pivotal event, the culmination of the narrative is the attack itself: “At 1:50 p.m., the D.C. police commander declared a riot at the Capitol” (The Washington Post 2021). It is a chaotic occurrence that requires an ordering. The authors place time stamps to keep the text chronologically coherent. “Telling stories by scrolling is called scrollytelling” (2020: 304) notifies Wibke Weber. While the reader scrolls through the text its structure has to be clear in order to describe the chaos of the riot in progress: “At 1:59 p.m., the first rioters reached the Capitol’s windows and doors and attempted to break inside. At 2:05 p.m., the first fatality was declared: Kevin Greeson, a Trump supporter from Alabama, suffered a heart attack just outside the building on the Capitol grounds” (The Washington Post 2021). Every minute contains an

important situation, a life-changing moment for an individual, which becomes an element of a complex narrative. The capitol is breached and the text is supported by photos and videos of people screaming and breaking windows. Weber concludes that “the journalistic advice ‘Show, don’t tell’ does not fit well in the context of data visualization. Instead, ‘Show and tell’ would be more appropriate” (2020: 307). Constructing the textual actual world of the Washington Post coverage its creators do both, show and tell. The heated exchange between one of the protesters Douglas Jensen and Capitol Police Officer Eugene Goodman is described in detail and supported with the video. The third person narration and audiovisual materials make the reader feel as if he/she was participating in the event. Furthermore, the coverage presents the perspective of the politicians who were scared for their lives: “Inside the chamber, lawmakers assumed the worst and realized they could soon be overrun by violent intruders. Jayapal thought the rioters were shooting into the chamber” (The Washington Post 2021). In the subsequent part of this chapter the perspective of the rioters who eventually entered the chamber is once more highlighted: “Hodgkins walked among the desks on the Senate floor and took a selfie to document his place in what felt like a once-in-a-lifetime moment. ‘It felt like some kind of dream,’ he said” (The Washington Post 2021). The journalist digital report has capacity to shift perspectives, presenting opposing sides of the textual actual world and the possible worlds of its characters’ psyches. The possible world of Donald Trump is represented in the text by the separate fragment on a black background: “Trump stewed in his grievance: over what he saw as Pence’s betrayal, over blame in the media of him and his supporters for the death and destruction at the Capitol and, ultimately, over the fact that his final attempt to overturn the election results was about to fail” (The Washington Post 2021). His world is indicated to be something else, something that exists beyond a black wall. Through that wall however Trump is able to reach the textual actual world and influence its characters taking advantage of technology. In the course of time “Capitol Police officers and their reinforcements made

progress in containing the violence and controlling the insurrectionists” (The Washington Post 2021). The final paragraphs of this chapter include perspectives of the people suffering traumas as a result of taking part in the riot. It ends with the speech by Senate Chaplain Barry Black:

“We deplore the desecration of the United States Capitol building, the shedding of innocent blood, the loss of life and the quagmire of dysfunction that threaten our democracy,” Black said. He then sounded an unmistakable condemnation of the weeks-long campaign to infect the body politic with lies and disinformation about the election. “These tragedies have reminded us that words matter,” Black continued, “and that the power of life and death is in the tongue.” (The Washington Post 2021)

The choice of this particular utterance makes for a perfect closure of the chapter “Bloodshed”. The narrative is finished because it has served its purpose, that is, to guide the reader through the presented storyworld. The last sentence by Barry Black refers to the relationship between a digital possible world and the actual world and how one affects the other. In the context of the hyperreality that a text evokes for its reader not only words themselves matter; it also matters how they are ordered specifically and how they function in a digital, multimodal environment.

The third chapter of the Washington Post coverage is entitled ‘Contagion’ and it concerns the aftermath of the events of January 6th. It focuses on the new narrative which has its inception in the previous chapters. It opens with a shift of the reader’s focus back to Capt. Carneysha Mendoza, whose “face burned painfully where pepper spray and other chemicals had seeped into her pores. She could still picture the enraged faces of those who had attacked her and her colleagues under the Capitol dome” (The Washington Post 2021). She becomes the first focalizer of the events following the attack. Through the depiction of her trauma the reader experiences what are the consequences of the violent riots for the character’s mental state. Her face is shown on a photography, in a rear mirror, shot from the back seat of a car. Further, the text mentions how Mendoza and the other officers said their goodbyes to their deceased friend

Brian D. Sicknick: “Near midnight, when it was time to remove Sicknick’s body, Mendoza and her fellow officers lined a hallway leading to a rear loading dock. They saluted as he rolled past, toward a van that would take him to the medical examiner’s office. Mendoza ordered the convoy first to drive by the Capitol” (The Washington Post 2021). That moment is described as if it was a scene in a movie, while the photo of Mendoza in a car resembles a staged scene. Marie Laure-Ryan notices that “movies can achieve the same types of immersion as written narratives: high on spatial, temporal and emotional (even higher in this respect than written narratives: crying is much more frequent when watching film than when reading books)” (2022: 169). What authors might have wanted to achieve here is a higher emotional immersion, corresponding to the one that can be observed in a film. For this purpose the sentences are short and to the point while the photo concentrates on Mendoza’s concerned expression and the capitol building hovering in the background. The reader receives the message that the next piece of the textual actual world will be dystopian and ambiguous as well.

The space of the presented storyworld is expanded when the text focuses on Clint Hickman: “Two thousand miles away, in the western suburbs of Phoenix, Clint Hickman woke up late on Jan. 7 in a house that was not his own” (The Washington Post 2021). He is the first politician mentioned in this chapter to be afraid of threats and attacks from Trump’s supporters hence he functions as a composite character. Additionally, the text acknowledges other politicians who feel unsafe; therefore the world traversed by the reader is characterized by a constant sense of endangerment. Furthermore, the textual actual world continues to be reshaped by its virtual counterpart: “Election officials around the country would receive hundreds of menacing emails and calls after Jan. 6” (The Washington Post 2021). As in Baudrillard’s *Simulation and Simulacra* “dystopia had already been realized at the time of writing” (Rebecca Haar and Anna McFarlane 2020: 256). The dystopian world is an effect of the dynamics between the textual actual world and the virtual world. Referring to the principle of minimal

departure the textual actual world of the chapter 'Contagion' appears through the reader's imagination to be the same as the actual world; therefore it is naturally assessed as its extension, as part of the actual storyworld. They are both cyberpunk dystopias. Haar and McFarlane continue that "the importance of virtual worlds in mediating social encounters and managing, if not outright shaping, the political spectrum is evidenced in the controversies surrounding Cambridge Analytica, foreign troll farms, and Russian interference in the 2016 American presidential election" (2020: 260). When it comes to the collision of the physical and virtual worlds, the scholars "emphasize the importance of cyberpunk's critique" (Haar and McFarlane 2020: 261). While each medium has its own means of creating a hyperreal experience, it is proper to examine distinct narratives as situated in separate possible worlds first, rather than taking for granted their apparently straightforward status within a larger structure, a storyworld. Haar and McFarlane conclude that in the actual world, technological simulation "has successfully mapped 'reality' in its entirety, from the capabilities of Google Earth to the tracking of human individuals via their social media accounts" (2020: 261). The textual actual world of the Washington Post coverage is governed by the same principles. The reader experiences it by listening to the phone call threats gathered by the journalists. State representative Alan Powell as many other politicians felt as if he was a character in a horror story: "The hate mail and ugly phone calls poured in. One Trump supporter called from Massachusetts to tell Powell, 'I know who you are and I know where you live because your address is public'" (The Washington Post 2021). Following Hayden White's notion of using literary techniques to present a more compelling account of a past event, the passages concerning threatened politicians read as a thriller or a horror fiction. Clint Hickman's story reaches the culmination when the chapter focuses on the devastating fire at his family's egg farm. The reader creates an image of the situation reading Hickman's words, noticing the photography of the fire, and clicking on the links to other websites that provide additional context.

The text guides the reader between various possible worlds of specific characters forming out of them a storyworld. The perspective changes from political figures in peril to Paul Hodgkins whose arrest is described in detail, to Donnel Harvin and the FBI's struggling investigation, and back to Carneysha Mendoza who reveals her trauma and speaks about her life after the attack. Her perspective is more nuanced as even the possible worlds of her dreams are brought to light: "The implications were already clear for those contending with the aftermath. Mendoza and another officer tried to console each other in an ongoing text thread, sharing their nightmares and fears, often late at night" (The Washington Post 2021). Mendoza's dreams are presented through text messages focusing on a disturbing imagery that was created by her trauma-infused mind.

The creators of the coverage skillfully connect the possible worlds separated by time and space while discovering how they influence each other. An instance of that narrative complexity is the account of what happened to Ashli Babbitt:

Sitting in the third row of the theater was Michelle Witthoeft, the mother of Ashli Babbitt. A Capitol Police officer had shot Babbitt as she tried to climb through a broken glass panel in the doorway leading to the Speaker's Lobby, yards away from the House chamber, where lawmakers were still evacuating. Several weeks before the Phoenix rally, Trump had called Witthoeft to praise her daughter, and she had encouraged him to speak out more about her death. He took her advice, telling Fox News days later that Babbitt was an "innocent, wonderful, incredible woman, a military woman." (The Washington Post 2021)

The fragment concerns three characters, Babbitt, her mother and Donald Trump, and it depicts three distinct settings, the rally in Phoenix, the attack on the Capitol, and the Fox News broadcast. By moving the time focus back and forth the text evokes a sense of coherency and indicates the cause and effect structure of the events. Through that specific composition Donald

Trump once again appears as a character who manipulates particular events to form the world-altering narrative he wishes.

Ultimately the chapter concludes all the characters' storylines. Paul Hodgkins was "the first rioter to be sentenced for a felony for his role on Jan 6" (the Washington Post 2021), while Clint Hickman was overtook by "frustration and weariness" (the Washington Post 2021), as he realized Trump supporters are going to undermine the results of the elections no matter the evidence that prove them wrong. Donald Trump's ongoing narrative was still overwriting the possible worlds of people who believed in him. That narrative is summed up in a couple of sentences: "Out in the crowd, the demonstrators echoed Trump over and over again. The Jan. 6 rioters were patriots, some said. The system is rigged. Those in power are corrupt. The country is crumbling, and elections can no longer be trusted to fix it" (The Washington Post 2021). The last chapter of the coverage finishes with an open ending, leaving the reader in a dystopian world. The next step for the reader is to ascribe the imagined possible world to the already established image of the actual world she/he exists in. This ontological activity is a mental process demanding a decision based on the information gathered, the perspective and the points of reference. The reader can get involved in the discussion under the article, in the comment section. It allows one to stay a little longer in the textual actual world, and it functions as a device assessing its status as actual.

Concluding, the online journalist article can form a hyperreality in reader's mind, for the time of the reading, as any other text, fictional or non-fictional. The Washington Post coverage of the attack on U.S capitol, on January 6, 2021, is a multimodal, intermedial endeavor that engages and immerses its readers in effective ways. The textual actual world that emerges from the reading is a cyberpunk dystopia, while its properties and inventory are the same as those of the actual world. Richard V. Ericson proposed that "there is a need to appreciate news for what it is, a form of literary fiction that provides valuable facts about the human condition"

(1998: 93). Over twenty years later, in the current actual storyworld this need is even more pressing as journalists combine media and come up with new modes of storytelling in order to make their readers choose a specific hyperreality. Cyberpunk realities however offer a way out: “The recent proliferation of hacktivism, leaktivism, and other forms of high-tech civil disobedience has reinforced the sense that we are now living in a cyberpunk future” (Milburn 2020: 369). The cyberpunk attitude towards the collision of the two opposite forces is a rebellion and in the rebellion there is a promise for the better tomorrow, for the post-cyberpunk reality. Colin Milburn concludes that “the first wave of cyberpunk activism had passed. But in its wake, a digital insurgency had awakened—opening the floodgates for a torrent of technopolitical actions and agitations, cascading toward an uncertain future” (2020: 379). The contemporary individual is overwhelmed by the hyperrealities evoked by endless digital texts; however, learning to navigate between them and being able to enter and exit them willingly creates a strong foundation for the rebellion against their hegemony.

CONCLUSION

The examination of hyperreality dilemmas in cyberpunk media narratives emphasized the fragmented image of reality, an image of a world full of possible worlds. Hyperreality, as proposed by Jean Baudrillard, is an absolute phenomenon, a simulation impossible to be compromised by its inhabitants. As such, the individual perceives a singular actual world, with all its signs, their signifiers and signified. However, an actual world physically accessible to an individual has its limitations. A human being might only touch it as far as it is within the reach of her/his hands, see as far as the eyesight can allow and hear as much as the hearing apparatus is able to take in. Therefore an image of the actual storyworld which exists outside of the physical reach is a mental construct, composed out of mimetic elements that can be used to create both fictional and actual narratives. Narratives are coherent structures that order the dispersed and chaotic elements. Through the connections between various narratives and their structural elements it is possible to elicit what is true, a fact, and what is a lie or an illusion. The point of reference dictates what is actual, which elements of the presented world are diegetic and which are non-diegetic or extradiegetic. The human cognitive apparatus allows one to transgress a set point of view by suspending the disbelief and taking an alternative perspective; it engages in what Marie-Laure Ryan calls 'playful recentering'. Although the alternative perspective has to be presented through a certain medium, the final effect is the same in every case, whether it concerns a fictional or an actual text. The projected world image is a mental construct that takes the place of the closest actual reality for the time spent with the text. It becomes the hyperreality although not exactly total. This hyperreality is manipulated by human cognition which paradoxically creates an absolute world image that can be entered and exited upon the wish of the recentered reader, user, audience, or player.

Perceiving reality as a dispersed phenomenon suggests that its structure resembles an infinite cube made out of boxes with Schrödinger's cat inside each of them. An individual has

only access to a singular box at the particular moment; however, it is possible to experience the perspectives of other boxes and to order them around the actual box by applying the means of playful recentering and through the adequate use of different media. Hayden White implied that literary techniques serve to produce an effective historical narrative. Literary texts organize words, which results in evoking possible worlds in the reader's imagination. The reader uses cognition in order to decode sentences into moving images, sounds and emotions. Film as a medium has the capacity to show an audiovisual representation of a world, and comics combine pictures and words to do so, while video games offer virtual environments which can be interacted with. In order to navigate between worlds an individual requires knowledge of how they are structured and how to describe them. Literary theory helps in disclosing complex webs of meanings in distinct narratives, while assessing the genre of a certain narrative or even a specific world aids in comprehending its nature and comparing it to its counterparts. In that manner the cyberpunk genre unites all the worlds I have analyzed in my work.

The interpretation of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), with the use of possible worlds theory, led to disclosing its complex world structure and the influence of the cyberpunk inventory on its dwellers. The dynamics of the physical realm and cyberspace demand of this storyworld's characters constant reevaluation of their perspective. The reader perceives that world through the eyes of Case, the protagonist, who eventually becomes a part of the virtual world, nevertheless retaining his independence.

The analysis of Richard Linklater's *A Scanner Darkly* (2006) focused on how film recenters audiences to a possible world, and how in a cyberpunk reality an individual might be unable to prove what is real. Bob Arctor, the main character of the film, has a split personality. Because of that his perception is flawed and produces worlds that only exist in his psyche. Cyberpunk inventory, such as the scramble suit or CCTV cameras, further deconstruct an image of a stable reality, asking its participants to watch closely and to stay aware.

The chapter on *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2022) revolved around comics' specific techniques of world construction. Through the use of modal completion and amodal completion, "the representation of those parts of perceived objects that are not currently visible" (Briscoe 2011: 155) the comics' reader fills in blank spaces between panels. Thus the reader's cognition is engaged in creating world image. This textual actual world is a cyberpunk reality, of which distinct possible worlds located in different time and space are stitched together with the cyberpunk inventory, that is, technology disseminating information.

Noticing world structure in *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020), a video game, proved that this medium has specific immersive capabilities that make the process of perspective recentering natural. Video games are interactive; therefore the player has influence on the course of the narrative path which eventually places her/his recentered focus in the particular world. Cyberpunk inventory, especially the Relic, the biochip that stores human psyche, creates a specific dynamic between the game's actual world and other possible worlds, such as cyberspace and the human psyche itself. The player can explore this dynamic through gameplay and in-game choices.

The Washington Post's coverage of the January 6th attack on the U.S Capitol is an example of an online journalistic text that implements narrative techniques and different media to evoke a mental image of a specific world in the reader's mind. It is a literary text with a plot, developed characters and a specific setting that can be assessed as cyberpunk. Furthermore, it uses audiovisual materials, videos, sound recordings and photos to construct its world. In order to immerse the reader it contains interactive elements such as links to other websites and the comment section. Cyberpunk characteristics, that is, dystopian power dynamics, intrusive technology, the collision of physical and virtual planes, define the textual actual world which through relations to other texts, considered to be actual, becomes a descriptive part of the actual storyworld.

Overall, the comparative analysis of cyberpunk narratives, fictional and actual, presented through the use of diverse media, confirmed that the reality outside an individual's physical reach is a mental construct. Its image is created by cognition, perception and imagination, through experiences gathered by the senses and their output, the physical body. In the same fashion the possible worlds that are mediated through texts appear real for the time of experiencing them. They are hyperrealities that readers, viewers and players venture into by suspending disbelief, by playful recentering. They also maintain world structures, ordered by narratives that can be ascribed to the cyberpunk genre. What at first was a literary genre has become a valuable description of an actual world. Cyberpunk as a genre has imploded, evolved into postcyberpunk, only later to return to its rebellious roots. The cyberpunk world is grim, dystopian, illusive and dangerous; however, between rogue artificial intelligences, wild cyberspace and dehumanizing body alterations there is space to fight for independence. In order to survive in that world the individual has to learn its inventory and be able to employ all kinds of media to traverse the boundaries between possible worlds in and out. Therefore a consistent examination of an individual perspective is of essence in the actual world, today.

In her new book *Object-Oriented Narratology* (2024), narratologist Marie-Laure Ryan turns to new object philosophy and posthumanism. Ian Bogost, the video game scholar, introduced 'alien phenomenology' to examine the being of specific objects. Perhaps in order to reach other possible and impossible worlds, existing beyond human perspective, more and more scholars will continue to criticize anthropomorphism and focus on posthumanism.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the affinities between cyberpunk worlds, both actual and fictional, constructed with the use of distinct contemporary media. Each medium has its own affordances that allow the creation of hyperreal narratives. Literature, films, comics, video games and online journalist articles maintain inherent structural properties, however they participate in their exchange as well. The comparative analysis of William Gibson's novel, *Neuromancer* (1984), Richard Linklater's film, *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), Warren Ellis' and Darick Roberston's comics series, *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2002), the video game *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020) and the Washington Post's coverage of the attack on the U.S capitol, questions the relationship of contemporary readers, audience or players with the textual worlds, and the distinction between fact and fiction. Analytical methodology consists of cognitive narratology, possible worlds theory, adapted scientific theories, film studies, comics studies, ludology, journalist theory and postmodern concepts such as Baudrillard's hyperreality, Lyotard's paralogy or Deleuze's schizoanalysis.

Keywords: hyperreality, fiction, possible worlds, literature, video games

STRESZCZENIE

Niniejsza praca analizuje pokrewieństwa pomiędzy cyberpunkowymi światami, zarówno rzeczywistymi, jak i fikcyjnymi, konstruowanymi z wykorzystaniem odrębnych, współczesnych mediów. Każde medium ma swoje afordancje, które pozwalają na tworzenie hiperrzeczywistych narracji. Literatura, film, komiksy, gry wideo i internetowe artykuły dziennikarskie zachowują przypisane właściwości strukturalne, choć jednocześnie uczestniczą w ich wymianie. Analiza porównawcza powieści Williama Gibsona *Neuromancer* (1984), filmu Richarda Linklatera *A Scanner Darkly* (2006), serii komiksów Warrena Ellisa i Daricka Roberstona *Transmetropolitan* (1997-2002), gry wideo *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020) oraz relacji dziennikarskiej *Washington Post* dotyczącej ataku na Kapitol Stanów Zjednoczonych kwestionuje związek współczesnych czytelników, odbiorców i graczy ze światami tekstów oraz rozróżnienie między faktem a fikcją. Metodologia analityczna obejmuje narratologię kognitywną, teorię światów możliwych, zaadaptowane teorie naukowe, filmoznawstwo, komiksoznawstwo, ludologię, teorię dziennikarstwa oraz koncepcje postmodernistyczne, takie jak hiperrzeczywistość Baudrillarda, paralogia Lyotarda czy schizoanaliza Deleuze'a.

Słowa kluczowe: hiperrzeczywistość, fikcja, światy możliwe, literatura, gry wideo