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WILLIAM GIBSON'S *BRIDGE TRILOGY*
AS CYBERPUNK SCIENCE FICTION

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Abstract:
One of the best known North American science fiction authors, William Gibson is praised as probably the most important novelist of the past two decades. Being the author of more than twenty short stories and eight novels, William Gibson has credited as the father of Cyberpunk Science Fiction. He is the first novelist to write about cyberspace, virtual reality, cyborgs, posthuman life and post-industrial society where information plays vital role. His stories and novels are about the influence of cybernetics and cyberspace technology on the human race. He combined the high-tech and low life in his early short stories and novels. Besides Sprawl Trilogy, he wrote Bridge Trilogy that composed of Virtual Light (1993), Idoru (1996), and All Tomorrow's Parties (1999). Like his first trilogy, Gibson's second trilogy is also about the technological, physical and spiritual transcendence. The present research paper attempts to study his Bridge Trilogy as postmodern novels.

Key Words: *cyberspace, virtual reality, cyborgs, posthuman life, post-industrial society.*

William Gibson's 'Bridge Trilogy' comprises of *Virtual Light* (1993), *Idoru* (1996) and *All Tomorrow's Parties* (1999). The trilogy explores such notions as simulation, virtuality, presence and pattern, tracking their impact upon the on-going emergence of the posthuman. The Bridge trilogy is cyberpunk science fiction in its interest in the aesthetic of postmodernism and the philosophy of punk: their style was dense, fast, and parodic; its favourite characters are punks, rockers and youth subcultural groups in general. In short cyberpunk science fiction articulates the status of science and technology in contemporary society. Gibson's outlook in the trilogy is morbid, cynical and dark.

William Gibson chose to set his novels in the immediate future, identified as the beginning of the twentieth first century. Gibson's *Virtual Light* is set in near future that is in 2005 in a postmodern, dystopian world peopled with electronically marginal in society. William Gibson has summed up his stand in San Francisco Bay Guardian in 1993, " It's a kind of a tragic artefact of science fiction that some people are naive enough to think that science fiction writers are predicting the future" (William Gibson 1993, 25). The novel depicts the future of the society on a global scale. There is a shift in Gibson's approach in the Bridge trilogy, the writer moves from the artificial realm of information technology to the geographical landscape of observed reality. The mystical cyberspace is replaced by the universe completely rooted in the meat world, post-industrial San Francisco. The novelist has depicted the near future universe looked way too much like the present one for comfort. Thus the novel is not about the future but about the present.

The novel is set in San Francisco, US where there is a ban on the manufacturing of the cigarettes. The government of US banned manufacturing of the cigarettes for its contribution to the high incidence of skin cancer. The massive inflation has given opportunities to foreign companies to enter in local law making and policy decision. As a result a privatized law-enforcement companies cruises LA in tanks designed by Ralph Lauren. Countries like Canada and Brazil have exploded into nation states. TV becomes essential commodity. People start to believe that the God resides everywhere even in old movie. Thus the novelist has created a dystopian atmosphere in the very beginning of the novel. The novelist has

presented an urban crazy-quilt, an emblem of contemporary America.

The term Bridge in 'Bridge Trilogy' is symbolical in the novel. Due to megalithic earthquake, the people from San Francisco have abandoned the Oakland Bay Bridge. However, the homeless have started to use the Bridge as shelter and the Japanese scholar named Yamaski's topic of research is the same Bridge. The Bridge becomes optimistic for the dwellers of the San Francisco. The young scholar, Yamaski tries to understand the American culture through the study of Bridge. Another instance of Gibson's optimism is seen in Bike. One of the employees of San Francisco Bike messenger service named Chevette Washington steals a pair of virtual light glasses from a gross guy at a party. Being a homeless and living on the Bay Bridge, Chevette Washington is a bicycle messenger in a unit called virtual light. The glasses produce images in the brain by stimulating the optic nerves without employing photos. Virtual light glasses provide pale simulacra of the cyberspace. Thus, the novel *Virtual Light* is described as a novel full of contradictions. The bikes are emblematic of environmentally conscious no-fuel freedom, intense energy, exhilarating speed, and sexy fashion. They are the embodiment of the techno hip.

The Bridge was collapsed and destroyed due to earthquake. The collapse of Bridge is symbolical of unstable geography of cyberspace. The whole city of San Francisco grows relentlessly around the destroyed Bridge and the dispossessed and homeless Chevette and many others reside on the Bridge. The Bridge has post-modern connotations such as illusory, floating and fanciful. Like the matrix of Sprawl Trilogy, the Bridge is an ever-proliferating construct without any obvious shape or clearly identifiable boundaries. It is described as an aesthetically paradoxically construct, an architectural and anthropological bricolage: "The integrity of its [the Bridge] span was rigorous as the modern program itself, yet around this had grown another reality, intent upon its own agenda. This had occurred piecemeal, to no set plan, employing technique and material. The result was something amorphous, startlingly organic....Its steel bones, in stranded tendons, were lost within an accretion of dreams: Tatto parlors, gaming arcades, dimly lit stalls, stacked with decaying magazines, sellers of fireworks, of cut bait, betting shops, sushi bars, unlicensed pawnbrokers, herbalists, barbers, bars. Dreams of commerce, their locations generally corresponding with the decks that had once carried vehicular traffic; while above them, rising to the very peaks of the cable towers, lifted the intricately suspended barrio, with its unnumbered population and its zones of more private....Everything ran together, blurring, melting in the fog" (Virtual Light 58-59).

These lines refer to a postmodern discourse of destruction and deformation of shape and form. Thus the Bridge becomes a pivotal location. William Gibson has used the Bridge as a metaphor for the nascent technologies bridging contemporaneous life and the highly advanced future.

In cyberpunk science fiction, architecture also receives important role. The data of the world and construct of the programmers are represented in the architectural quality. William Gibson has introduced various architectural patterns and textures of topological, spatial and bodily constructs, and suggested human being to escape from. In this novel, Gibson explores marginal and luminal architectural spaces and in doing so translates contemporary architecture into a collage of past forms and practices which give rise to uncanny sensations and interpretations.

The stolen glasses have unlikely importance. The police Loveless, Svobodov and Orlovsky two Russian immigrants begin to find out Chevette and glasses. Certain plans are implanted in the glasses. A powerful corporation implants plan of rebuilding San Francisco in the glasses. That is why glasses become pivotal and danger to the person who possesses them. Lucius Warbaby has recruited a former cop-turned private security agent called Berry Rydell to recover the pair of glasses. However, Berry Rydell is ignorant about the importance of glasses. He is unknown about the information the glasses contain. In cyberpunk science fiction, information plays most important role. The multinational companies have appointed cops and other to find out the glasses. Redyll meets Chevette Washington and falls in love of her. When he realizes the inherent danger of the glasses, Redyll is forced to take the side of Orlovsky and Svobodov and break his agreement with Warbaby. He along with Chevette runs away from enemies. Warbaby belongs to

elite class whereas Redyll and Chevette are the poor dwellers of Bridge. The elite class wants to wield the power with the help of information in the form of glasses. The information, in this case, is the plans to rebuild an entire city completely without taking into account what its inhabitants think.

According to the critics, the novel is not a cyberpunk but about the cops involved in the trouble. Redyll's an online computer is hacked to indicate an emergency in a residential apartment in order to catch the wife of the owner of the apartment. Redyll accepts the work of finding a pair of glasses. His search leads to the eventual discovery of the plan that will lead to San Francisco being under a computer network-based dictatorship. His discovery leads him in a terminable position. However, his newly acquired knowledge and the hackers' aid help him to sic Death Star, a riot control super-machine.

Thus the novel contains post-apocalyptic anarchy, protagonists immersed in and dealing with this anarchy, shadowy evil power structures that threaten to wreck them at every turn. Although the novel deals with the newest achievements of electronic and information technology, it is less than conventional cyberpunk novel. The standard cyberpunk element, 'something stolen from a courier that everyone wants to get their hands on' makes the novel cyberpunk science fiction. There is the decline of cyberpunk science fiction genre because cyberpunk authors are concerned with the dark visions of future. Besides this the writers are varied in their use of style and portrait of technology. In this connection Bruce Sterling writes, "However, I don't worry much about the future of razor's edge techno-punk. It will be bowdlerized and parodied and reduced to a formula, just as all other SF innovations have been. It scarcely matters much, because as a 'movement,' 'Punk SF' is a joke. Gibson's litterateur who happens to have an unrivalled grasp of the modern pop aesthetic....By '95 we'll all have something else cooking" (2007: vii).

William Gibson's *Idoru* is the second novel in Bridge Trilogy published in 1999. The novel is, like cyberpunk science fiction, set in near future that is in the post-earthquake world of San Francisco of the early 21st century. The novel tells the story of Computer hacker Laney, marriage of human and artificial intelligence construct, and other parties interested in finding out nanodevice used for the union of human and AI construct. The novel has all gritty icons of postmodern cyberculture: cool cyber hangouts, rock stars, Russian Mafia, virtual reality, nanotechnology etc. William Gibson presents pop culture and our obsession with it in the novel. The author uses the Japanese cult phenomenon as a starting point and crafts excellent and engaging tale of future world. He explores the nature of celebrity in the information age, a phenomenon not fully explained by either reality or illusion. He continues to meld society and technology.

The novel tells two parallel stories: one of Chia's journey and second is the story of Colin Laney, a data miner. Chia's story is associated with Rez's proposal to marry an AI construct, idoru whereas Laney's story is associated with investigation of the world of Rei Toei that is Idoru. The title of the novel is the name of "personality-construct, a categories of software agents the creation of information-designers: a synthespian" (*Idoru* 92). Idoru is a media star who exists in virtual reality. Rei Toei is an Idoru, the Japanese idol. Idoru is a synthetic pop singer, created by a team of software engineers. One of the mega-rock stars of the musical group and Pop singer, Rez decides to marry Rei Toei (Idoru), which is apparently not possible. His master has raised questions over the impossibility of the marriage of Rez and Tei. Hence, the central character, Colin Laney is entrusted the task of finding out manipulators of Rez for marring virtual construct called Rei Toei. Laney is presented as an intuitive fisher of patterns of information. There is another group called the Seattle Chapter of the Rez Fan Club wants to investigate the impossible marriage of human and AI construct. Hence Tolyo chapter of Rez Fan Club appoints fourteen year old Chia Pet McKenzie to find out what is happening. Chia meets a woman called Maryalice in Tokyo. Meryalice makes Chia to carry a contraband item through customs in Tokyo.

William Gibson has given more space to the past life of Laney who was previously working for a powerful information organization called 'Slitscan', an organisation involves in destruction of media personalities by exposing the secrets. Slitscan is a kind of corporate gossip-mongerer on the Net. Growing up in the Gainsville Federal Orphanage, Laney inadvertently restricted control over his future identity.

Only considering the program's rewards, he voluntarily has participated in a series of experimental drug tests. Laney was working for a company with no scruples and suddenly found that he couldn't just watch someone's life implode without doing something. He tried to expose them, but his own background threatened his credibility. He felt guilty for becoming responsible for the suicide of a woman. As a result he has taken a job in Japan to escape the revenge of his former employer. Though wounded by the mistakes he made during his tenure at Slitscan, Laney is nevertheless intrigued by the offer. Laney is asked to attempt to predict the uncontrollable Rez's future behaviour: "The relevant data, in terms of his current employability, was that he was an intuitive fisher of patterns of information: of the sort of signature a particular individual inadvertently created in the net as he or she went about the mundane yet endlessly multiplex business of life in a digital society. Laney's concentration-deficit, too slight to register on some scales, made him a natural channel-zapper, shifting from program to program, from database to database, from platform to platform, in a way that was, well, intuitive" (*Idoru* 125). Laney's employers view him as an instrument to do research. Nominally a "research assistant on a project" (*Idoru* 31) at Dat America, a group of French scientists teaches Laney to detect nodal points within masses of unorganised data. He is treated as merely a better piece of software. Laney is hired by scarred, giant Blackwell, Rez's fiercely protective security chief. Blackwell is concerned that someone may be trying to manipulate his boss, Rez having expressed his determination to marry Rei Toei, a computer personality construct. Laney cannot work with insufficient and impersonal data and insists on meeting Rez. As a result he is captivated by Rei Toei.

Another organization uses Laney's story to expose Slitscan's involvement in illegal spying. The war between media organizations forms the central concern of the novel. Laney is not happy with his new job and hence leaves both organizations and is left dry, high and alone like cyberpunk heroes. The controller of Slitscan organization attempts to blackmail Laney with false evidence into betraying his current employers Lo/Rez.

Chia McKenzie is another active member of Fan Clubs for Lo/Rez. She is disappointed to see her organization's indifference to the marriage of Rei Toei and Rez. However, Chia decides to investigate on her own and seeks the help of host Mitsuko's brother Masahiko, an Otaku who is a member of the hacker community called 'Walled City.' When she is on her way to Tokyo, another passenger inserts some contraband into her luggage. She finds herself on the run from smugglers and the Russian mob, her only protection a band of computer-savvy teenage boys with access to a virtual reality space of unimaginable complexity. Consequently, her path crosses Laney's, and the nature of Rez's romantic interest in the Idoru is revealed. Eddie's Russian gangster friends demand contraband. When they come to know that Chia, Rez and Laney are connected, they start to hunt Chia.

The novel *Idoru* is set in an electronic architecture of the 'City of darkness' that constitutes a simulation of the dense and multi-layered architectural structure of the Walled City in China. William Gibson has given beautiful description of the Walled City as cyberspatial city of darkness: "They (Chia and Mahasika) were inside now, smoothly accelerating, and the squirming density of the thing was continual visual impact, an optimal drumming...And they were not alone: Others there, ghost-figures, whipping past, and everywhere the sense of eyes...Fractal filth, bit-rot, the corridor of their passage tented with crazy swoops of faintly flickering lines of some kind...Then they were ascending a maze of twisting stairwells, still ascending, and Chia took a deep breath and closed her eyes" (*Idoru* 182).

Tatiani G. Rapatzikou writes about the cyberspatial nature of the Walled City, "The Digitally complex infrastructure of the Cyberspatial City of Darkness, caused by the technological manipulation and advanced processing of the accumulated data, inscribes itself within the recognisable mechanical and urban pattern of the Walled City" (2004: 190). The novel interlinks the physical space with the virtual or imaginary and creates something new space: "The walls alive with shifting messages in the characters of every written language, doorways flipping past, each one hinting at its own secret world. And this time she (Chia) was more aware of the countless watching ghosts. That must be how people presented here, when

you weren't in direct communication with them. A city of ghost shadows" (*Idoru* 283).

The movement of Chia and her brother Masahiko are watched and observed by other denizens of the Walled City. Chia unconsciously takes with her the contraband and the denizens are in search of contraband. The contraband is a highly illegal nanotech assembler, a device used for high-speed material fabrication. While visiting Japan to investigate some new rumours about the group, she is used to smuggle illegal nanoware to the Russian criminal underground. Both Laney and Chia get caught up in the intrigues swirling about the plans of Rez, one half of the band, to marry Rei Toei, an Idoru who exists only in virtual reality. Gibson excels here in creating a warped but comprehensible future saturated with logical yet unexpected technologies. Maryalice's boyfriend, Eddie has smuggled in on behalf of the Russian Mafia. Both Chia and Masahiko hide in a hotel where all parties come and converge. In the hotel toilet everything is high-tech, controlled by buttons marked in Japanese, which Chia cannot understand. Idoru (Rei) manifests herself on Chia's computer screen. Eddie wants to reclaim the nanotech device. Chia's friend Zona Rosa views events over the Net. She saves Chia. Rez and Blackwell also enter the hotel. Even Laney also rushes towards hotel. Both Rei and Rez use nanotechnology device to marry. However, the novelist leaves the ending of the novel open to readers to see whether the marriage is possible. The mystery of the marriage of human and AI construct still remains at the end of the novel.

The novel *Idoru* is linked with the previous novel *Virtual Light* as it shares incidental characters. William Gibson who has added cyberspace to the lexicon seems somewhat fatigued by the future. The author has shifted the action of the novel from street and cybernetic byways of 21st century to post-quake Tokyo. The main concern of Gibson in *Idoru* is human's reaction to technology. Laney and Chia are afraid of a union between the authentic rock band and the synthetic Idoru and the physical security of Rez. Gibson seems to suggest that human being uses technology to transform everything into the new world where everything is manufactured.

All Tomorrow's Parties is the last novel in 'Bridge Trilogy'. The novel once again takes place in a future ruined California. Many of the characters from the previous two novels are appeared in the present novel. All three novels in Bridge Trilogy have many common motifs and themes without being sequential. When interviewed, Gibson reviews the intension of writing the novel: "Without my having intended it, it seemed that both *Virtual Light* and *Idoru* emerged with more than the usual number of inexplicable connectors having off them. They were clearly connected to each other, but there was something that suggested that both of them were connected even more profoundly to some non-existent third. There is sort of triangulated on a non-existent book-*All Tomorrow's Parties* in it" (Therese Littleton 2). Thus the novel is loosely connected with *Virtual Light* and *Idoru*. The novel is cyberpunk science fiction in that it has portrayed the effect of emerging technology on the society. Set around the decaying San Francisco Bay Bridge, the novel tells the story of a youth involved in finding out the nodal points that changes the course of human history.

Laney of *Idoru* reappears as a protagonist of *All Tomorrow's Parties*. When child Laney was subjected to research study and certain investigations are made on him. He was given a drug that allows him to enter cyberspace and have access to endless streams of internet data. The use of drugs is one of characteristic features of cyberpunk. Due of research on Laney, he has ability to see nodal points in history. A sociological researcher, Yamazaki is interested in the study of non-established marginal urban realm. Cardboard City is the ruined underground space of Tokyo where Yamazaki starts searching something hidden. Cardboard City remains hidden and undiscovered. It has something fascinating and hence Yamazaki is bent on doing research on the city. He has done a research on the boy called Laney by using nanotechnology and the result is the ability given to Laney to see nodal points in history-times and places where important changes are occurring.

When Laney grows up, he decides to see what is beneath the surface of Bridge. He is convinced that something big is going to happen in San Francisco. He is not certain about what is going to happen but he

knows that the happening will bring changes in the world. Laney travels through a cyberspace as if it is a place any one can go to. Laney is described as a tortured master computer-hacker and one of the few humans with rare gift of being able to recognize the true patterns that exist behind the shimmering data flood from cyberspace. Laney has been gifted almost prophetic powers because he is dosed with something called SB-5. This drug allows Laney to see the world as data which he can interpret with relative case. As a result he senses a gathering of possibilities in San Francisco. The drug SB-5 has also left Laney obsessed with a man named Cody Harwood. Laney's world is composed of computer bits. He has schooled Rei Toei to interact with the crude, sensual characters who are people in the ordinary world. He suspects that his interpretation of the data streams are being tampered with by an outside agent named Harwood. He is not suspicious about the nature of Harwood but he does not believe him also. Laney is not able to get to the Bridge, hence he appoints Rydell, a California rent-a-cop to investigate. Redyll has also the habit of travelling through cyberspace. Redyll is happy with the low wages job at the Lucky Dragon store. He leaves the job accepts the one assigned by Laney. His new job is also challenging one as he is being followed by the bunch of thugs. Redyll is accompanied by his girl-friend Chevette. Laney has given Redyll the device that contains Rei Toi, a computer generated idol-singer.

When Redyll is introduced to a biotechnologically new bodily defined subject, he is confused: "Did being a hologram feel like anything? (He doubted it.) Or did the programs that generated her [the idoru which is a personality construct] somehow provide some greater illusion of being there? But if you weren't real in the first place, what did you have to compare not being there to?" (*All Tomorrow's Parties* 202) Redyll is not able to distinguish between what is natural and artificial; the boundaries between the organic and inorganic have become blurred. The statement challenges the stability and rationality of the human body and a non- existent object. This marks a transition from mere physicality to more transient and elusive forms of being a hologram. When an electronic human being surrogate emerges, it embodies horror as an alien self-invaded and taken over by some strange mechanical power. Thus cyborg is another feature of cyberpunk as reflected in the novel. Both Redyll and Chevette have released Idoru (Rei Toi) like a genie from a computer in an upstairs apartment in downtown San Francisco. The novel ends with the destruction of the Bridge. William Gibson does not necessarily suggest the annihilation but possibly announce the dilution and dispersion of the shapes and patterns presented into weightless forms of being. The writer does not necessarily wish to control the data. What is being invoked is the new world rising above the architectural debris: "The bridge, behind him now, perhaps forever, is a medium of transport become a destination: salt air, scavenged neon, the sliding cries of gulls. He has glimpsed the edges of a life there that he feels is somehow ancient and eternal. Apparent disorder arranged in some deeper, some unthinkable fashion" (*All Tomorrow's Parties* 273).

William Gibson has lost interest in cyberpunk science fiction as his novels in 'Bridge Trilogy' have less amount of cyberpunk features. By 1980s, cyberpunk is on the decline. By the late 1980's critics and authors alike are questioning the relevance of cyberpunk's by-now tired motifs. Brooks Landon argued that Gibson "turned out the lights" on cyberpunk in 1988, with the publication of *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (240). The futuristic and predictive science fictional content of the writing was also increasingly in doubt: "The real message of cyberpunk was inevitability...not speculation or extrapolation [but an]...unhysterical, unsentimental understanding of the profound technological and epistemological implications of accomplished and near-accomplished cultural fact" (Landon, Brooks 1991: 239). Gibson's personal skepticism towards science fiction's claim to...a predictive function places his writing in this border zone. His novels help to provide what he terms the 'science fiction tool kit' increasingly necessary to 'describe the world we live in' (McIntyre, Tom 52).

The decline of cyberpunk and cyberspace into marketing device and hyper-reality requires Gibson's abandonment of digital tectonics for analogue information structures-a device through which to explore the retro-futuristic posthuman. By refiguring the Bridge community of *Virtual Light* as an organic

hive-like entity, Gibson transposes metaphor into architectural meta-form, refurbishing the recurrent theme in his work of the effect of place, space and architecture on posthuman form and ontology. This new neo-tribal heterotopian space lays the foundation for the mediation of the posthuman coded as information topology in Idoru. The disruption of the subject/object dichotomy in *Virtual Light* prefigures the boundary transgressions of flesh, data, and biologic nanotechnology in *Idoru* and *All Tomorrow's Parties*, enabling the inversion of inner and outer through body, landscape, and cyborgian architecture. In the latter novel, the idoru Rei inverts the science fiction trope of transcendence-she escapes the binary digital confines of data for rhizomatic analogue complexity-achieving a metaphorical symbiotic union with the corporeality of the rock star Rez. The iconic mapping of their converging data creates an unstable assemblage, an involution where differences are replaced by diffractions. For Gibson, then, the posthuman becomes an eruption within the human.

Like 'Sprawl Trilogy', Gibson's the 'Bridge Trilogy' explores the dehumanizing effect of technology on society. Gibson's 'Bridge Trilogy' explores notions of simulacra, virtuality and the effect of nanotechnology on the society. The author depicts the evolution of the digital figure into the post-human, a growth from simulation to virtuality. Rei Toei of *All Tomorrow's Parties* emerges as a post-human figuration of information theory. However, this trilogy lacks the classic style and brilliant ideas and dazzling scenes of cyberspace of 'Sprawl Trilogy.' There is the lack of cyberspace and virtuality in 'Bridge Trilogy.' William Gibson is criticised for his praising of technology in Sprawl and Bridge Trilogies. However, Gibson remains indisputably the finest of the cyberpunk writer; it is because of his poetic style and physical and erotic presentation. William Gibson's novels speak of population comprised of genetically engineered wetware wonders, electrically addicted buttonheads, fragmented post-human enclaves, and terminal cyborgs giving rise to new state of being. The author portrays how the Western culture is suffering a crisis brought on by advanced electronic technologies. William Gibson attempts to identify and narrate the ambiguities that mark the technological contours of contemporary culture. William Gibson presents an aspiration of human being to transcendence and the reconfiguration of the machine as mythical entity. Gibson's vision of the technological outlaw zone affirms the premise that the field of changing and growing technologies will always be a site of contentious power struggles and irrepressible creative energies. Gibson's later fiction, notably the San Francisco trilogy, is more hopeful about the possibility of positive change resulting from such battles.

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