

THE DANGERS BEHIND TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS:  
POSTHUMAN CONTROL IN NEAL STEPHENSON'S *SNOW CRASH*

by

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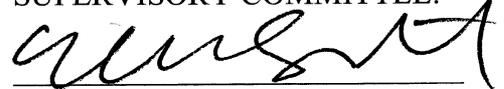
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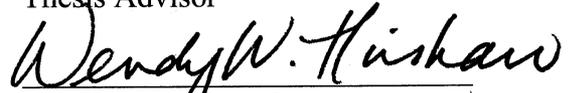
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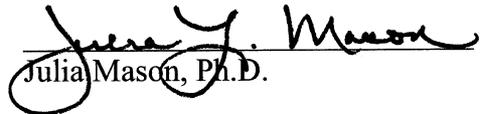


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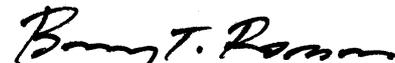
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## ABSTRACT

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Neal Stephenson's 1992 novel *Snow Crash* depicts a world in which the more freedom the characters believe they have, the more control is actually being exerted upon them. I argue that *Snow Crash* parallels the world in which we are beginning to find ourselves today. In the modern world, we have the convenience of the Internet, which gives us the belief that we have a great degree of control over our environment. However, my argument stems from the idea that the freedom the characters believe that they are afforded in such a universe is actually another level of control being exercised upon them. I argue that our world is mimicked by the world of *Snow Crash* in a way that shows how truly little freedom we are given in our posthuman society.

## DEDICATION

To Taylor Howard, my graduate school partner-in-crime, without whom I am certain I would have given up and gone home long before I got to this point. You have been an absolute inspiration and encouragement when I needed it most. This thesis really would not be possible without you. We did it!

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## I. INTRODUCTION

*[Science fiction] is a universe of simulation, which is something else altogether.*

—*Jean Baudrillard*  
Simulacra and Simulation

Modern individuals assume that they have a higher degree of freedom in the world through the use of the Internet. The Internet gives the user the illusion of being in complete control of the browsing experience: as long as we know how, we can access nearly any information we desire. Although technology in general is not a recent development, the physical integration between humans and technology is a new concept, which is defined as “posthumanity.” Posthumanity, then, is the term ascribed to this idea: humans are now integrated with technology in such a way that they transcend the traditional definition of what it means to be "human" in hopes of becoming an even higher-thinking organism.

Neal Stephenson's 1992 science fiction novel *Snow Crash* depicts a posthuman world in which many of its inhabitants have a second existence in an Internet-like network called the Metaverse. The users of the Metaverse log into the system by way of a virtual-reality headset which “wrap[s] halfway around [one's] head; the bows of the goggles have little earphones that are plugged into his outer ears” (20). When one is “goggled” into the Metaverse, his headset will “throw a light, smoky haze across his eyes and reflect a distorted wide-angle view of a brilliantly lit boulevard that stretches off into an infinite blackness. This boulevard does not really exist; it is a computer-rendered view

of an imaginary place” (20). The user then navigates this fantasy world by use of an avatar, a virtual icon that represents his presence within the Metaverse. Through the use of this virtual world, a Metaverse user may lead two lives: one in the Metaverse and one in Reality. Kaye Mitchell, author of the essay, "Bodies That Matter: Science Fiction, Technoculture, and the Gendered Body," says that "[v]irtuality, then, in the most naïve representations of it, becomes an absolute transcendence: the transcendence of materiality, of ideology, of the realm of discourse" (111). Virtuality can be described as a simulation of human life; for Mitchell, virtuality allows one to completely transcend his world into a higher, virtual realm, which is how the Metaverse works. I would argue, however, that virtuality is only an imitation of the transcendence promised through posthumanity. In this thesis, I will argue that the posthuman world of *Snow Crash* parallels the world in which we find ourselves today. Our lives are filled with the conveniences of technology that allow that same technology to control us to some degree. Not all cases of this control are negative, but in *Snow Crash* Stephenson has created a caricature of his world and emphasized all of that negative control. While he could not have intended to satirize the culture of his world twenty years in the future, *Snow Crash* nevertheless reflects the Internet-crazed culture of 2012 that did not exist the year Stephenson's novel was published. My argument stems from the idea that the freedom the characters in *Snow Crash* believe they are afforded in their posthuman world is veiled control, which affects every aspect of their lives.

Though the Internet did not become a part of everyday use until the late 1990s, *Snow Crash* represents the potential devastation that could arise from relinquishing control of personal information by posting it on the Internet. Of particular interest is the

way in which the characters are controlled through their physical boundaries, the Metaverse, and religion. This control is exerted upon the characters in a way that reflects the modern world. According to Foucault, in a disciplinary society, one governing body must function as a peacekeeping structure, which he describes as a carceral system. As I will show, the world of *Snow Crash* functions like a prison in that this world has such rigid societal structures that both confine and control the characters in the novel that they have no escape from its control.

In the modern society, like the world of *Snow Crash*, we have access to the Internet, a virtual "web" of interconnected information. We take much of this information and the ease of access for granted; yet, in many cases we fail to realize that the more "freedom" we feel we possess through our use of the Internet, the more we are actually allowing the other Internet users to control us. For just one example of this type of control, consider the fact that businesses can target us with advertisements based on the websites we visit and the information we release to those organizations. It appears as though we have limitless search options and information available in front of us, but, as it turns out, the advertisers are taking control of Internet users by convincing them to buy their products. There is arguably no escape from marketing on the Internet because, as with television, advertisers fund many websites. The Internet is just as much of a business as any for-profit organization in Reality. Even the government has a degree of control over the Internet—it can shut down a website at will if it violates a federal law, such as a website that allows the illegal downloading of music. Like the characters in *Snow Crash*, the more freedom we believe we attain through the use of the Internet, the more control is actually being exerted upon us. Our freedom on the Internet and Stephenson's characters'

freedom on the Metaverse is just an illusion.

To begin framing my argument, I will use Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman* to explain that the posthuman world allows individuals to be controlled more easily through their use of technology. In Hayles's summary of posthumanism (which, she emphasizes, is only a summary and by no means an all-encompassing or exclusive definition), she says, "[T]he posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines" (2-3). This "seamless articulation" is precisely what the characters in *Snow Crash* are experiencing; some of the characters are so completely fused with their technology that they no longer look or function like a typical human. Sabine Heuser, in her discussion about gender in cyberpunk introduces the protagonists from William Gibson's popular cyber-punk texts, *Neuromancer*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, and *Count Zero* to illustrate her idea that the "protagonist is usually a young white male versed in the hard-boiled lingo of the hacker underworld" (131).

Stephenson's protagonist, aptly named Hiro Protagonist, is a young man who is a computer hacker by profession, but he is neither white nor two-dimensional. He spends a majority of his time goggled into the Metaverse because he believes it to be his only escape from the harshness of Reality. As a Hacker, Hiro believes that he exerts a higher degree of control over the virtual environment, but this belief turns out to be false. In fact, because the characters believe in the safety of the Metaverse, they are more vulnerable to the institutions of control within the novel. Again, Stephenson is creating a satire about the effects that control has on such an innocent individual. Neither the posthuman Internet user, nor the fictional Metaverse user wants to believe that his virtual space is a dangerous playground; therefore, his deliberate disbelief makes him more susceptible to

the framework of control inside these virtual worlds.

The second portion of my argument will be framed using Michel Foucault's "The Carceral," a chapter from *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, in which Foucault outlines the history and importance of the modern carceral archipelago. As Foucault explains, the carceral system in a society pervades every area of an individual's life. The world of *Snow Crash*, as I will show, emulates this carceral system. The characters in the novel live and work behind walls and other physical barriers that keep them separated from one another. The idea that secure parameters equate to safety pervades every societal institution in *Snow Crash*. There are divisions that provide security in every dwelling and place of business in the society of *Snow Crash*. Even the Metaverse has its own security, which begins with the basic rules and regulations of the virtual world and expands into the virtual environments that have been constructed by the Metaverse users. All of these structures of security give a sense of safety to the people who operate within these real and virtual worlds. The carceral system, as Foucault explains, is not outside of the society, but "at the centre of this city . . . not the 'center of power,' not a network of forces, but a multiple network of diverse elements—walls, space, institution, rules, discourse" (307). Every part of life is pervaded and controlled by the institution of the carceral. To exist in society, in *Snow Crash* and in the modern world, is to exist within Foucault's carceral system. However, as I will argue, this existence allows the characters to be controlled, rather than freed. Because the carceral system pervades every aspect of one's life in *Snow Crash*, one has no freedom to escape that system. He may be given what appears to be freedom through devices such as the Metaverse, but when he steps back into reality, he is still part of his enclosed society.

Because the setting of *Snow Crash* is a posthuman world, the characters are given more freedom through their technology, and they simultaneously allow more control to be exerted upon them. They have the freedom of the Metaverse, but it's owned and operated by L. Bob Rife, the villain of the story, and independent computer hackers, both of whom define the rules and regulations of the Metaverse and the virtual environments contained therein. The disciplinary system that regulates the institutions in Reality is also present, no matter how covertly, in the Metaverse. These institutions, both real and virtual, serve to control and contain the people therein. As Giles Deleuze explains in "A Postscript on Societies of Control," the largest institutions in our society are constructed in a fashion similar to prisons. He says, "We are in a generalized crisis in relation to all the environments of enclosure-prison, hospital, factory, school, family. . . . These are the societies of control, which are in the process of replacing the disciplinary societies" (3-4). For the majority of society, prisons are unnecessary because in a disciplinary society, we are conditioned from a very young age to respect the authority of institutions. We are raised to be "docile bodies," which, as Foucault explains, "may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved" (136). It does not seem surprising, then, that schools are structured similar to institutions of incarceration. When children enter school, the school building with its classrooms (cells) and teachers (prison guards) conditions them to think that they are to remain subservient to their superiors in this kind of environment. They are not allowed to leave the building without express permission and they must adhere to the school schedule. Even the corporate world, an environment occupied solely by adults, operates in such a strict, regimented fashion. Instead of teachers for prison guards, workers have bosses, and they are given cubicles (cells) in which to complete their work.

While a prison is not explicitly necessary to control the docile bodies within these institutions, the method by which the docile bodies are controlled remains similar.

This carceral structure, although not as obvious in the Metaverse, is still present in the virtual society. The computer code that constructs the Metaverse becomes the physical structure, the policing entities such as security daemons the prison guards, and the environments a user has permission to enter are the cells. The panoptic system, by virtue of its name, is structured in such a way that it allows the governing body to observe its people at all times. As Foucault explains, "Heads or deputy-heads of 'families' . . . had to live in close proximity to the inmates; . . . they practically never left their side, observing them day and night; they constituted among them a network of permanent observation" (295). No matter where one exists in the world of *Snow Crash*, he is always under observation. If he is in his home, he is subject to the rules and regulations of his housing plan; if he is at work, he is subject to those rules and regulations of that organization. Even in the Metaverse, one is subject to the rules governing the virtual environment. An individual may not realize it, but someone is always watching him to ensure that order is maintained in society.

In his piece titled "Forget Foucault," however, Baudrillard challenges the key points of both Foucault's and Deleuze's theories about power. Together, these texts allow for the depiction of a posthuman world in which control is exerted upon the users of such technology. Power, as Baudrillard explains, is no more "real" than the notion of control; it "is only a simulation of perspective—it is no more reality than economic accumulation—and what a tremendous trap that is" (41). Power contains as much weight as a belief that someone may hold. For one to exert his power over another, the lesser

party must first acknowledge the power of the former. Should the lesser party ignore or disregard the power of the former, his power holds no weight. The individual with the power cannot control another person—in both mind and body—unless the lesser party allows the control to be exerted upon him. My argument aims to further complicate what the notion of power means to Baudrillard, Foucault, and Deleuze. I am not simply dealing with the definition of power, but rather how the concept of power works in a posthuman environment. One cannot hold control or power in his hand. One only has the belief that he holds power and control. For Baudrillard, the notion of gaining power is impossible. He argues that one cannot hold power in his hands any more than one can hold space. Baudrillard does not believe in the physical representation of power. It is not something a person can ever command. In a virtual environment like the Internet or the Metaverse, therefore, the control that both parties hold (the person or organization exerting the control or the person who is being controlled) is all an illusion. The structure of a social system that allows such control only works because both parties agree to acknowledge the position of the other. In our society, we respect and acknowledge the power held by the government, but again, it's all an illusion. At any point in time, the citizens of a given society can rise up and overthrow their government—which is precisely what happens at the end of *Snow Crash*, when Hiro defeats L. Bob Rife. Hiro no longer agrees to acknowledge the control L. Bob Rife exerts over him, and then Hiro subverts and exploits this power to destroy the Snow Crash virus.

There are various institutions of control in *Snow Crash* (society, technology, and religion) through which the characters are lulled into a false sense of security through their reality-escaping Metaverse. The characters believe they exist outside the limits of

this kind of system. To escape into the Metaverse is to leave reality (and any kind of limiting system) behind. What they fail to realize is that one can never truly leave the system. The levels of control become strengthened even further due to the fact that the Metaverse is owned and operated by L. Bob Rife, the character who is surreptitiously trying to control the minds of all the people in his world. However, even Rife can be defeated, as evidenced by his demise at the end of the novel. Just as Foucault explains, every person is part and parcel of the carceral system, by virtue of his existence.

In my first chapter I will argue that the characters in *Snow Crash* are first and foremost controlled by the physical boundaries of their society. Because every city is governed by a corporately owned franchise, the citizens of these cities may not move freely across their physical space, nor may they interact with one another easily. The citizens of Stephenson's world lock themselves behind gated communities and work in franchise-owned institutions because they seem to believe that these environments will keep them safe. What they fail to realize is that by allowing themselves to become a part of these franchises, they are giving control of themselves to these institutions.

In my second chapter I will argue that this corporate control extends to the Metaverse, although the characters believe that they have nearly unlimited freedom in the virtual world. The perceived freedom of the Metaverse is ultimately what allows the characters to be controlled so tightly; they do not realize that they are being controlled because they feel so free in the virtual environment. Ironically, inside the fluid boundaries of the Metaverse is first place the reader encounters the multi-faceted drug/virus, Snow Crash. A complete crash of one's computer is commonly dubbed a "snow crash," so named for its resemblance to falling snow because of the black and

white static that sizzles across the screen. In this instance, however, a snow crash is a system crash of one's mind. Hiro, the first to encounter Snow Crash, asks Juanita, another hacker, if she knows about it: "This Snow Crash thing—is it a virus, a drug, or a religion?" and Juanita replies, "What's the difference?" (Stephenson 200). Snow Crash does exist in all these different forms, which makes it incredibly difficult to define and even more difficult to understand.

As I will show in my third chapter, through technology we are given a measure of freedom that leads us to believe we are actually free while it simultaneously gains more control over us. Snow Crash is the creation of L. Bob Rife, the megalomaniac who hopes to gain control of all the people and institutions in the novel by first and foremost spreading the virus/drug through his megachurch, Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates. The Pearly Gates franchise is funded by Rife, who "owns a majority share in Perlgate Associates, which is the multinational that runs the Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates chain" (112). The irony here is that one might expect a church to be a safe place, but in *Snow Crash*, the church is the physical location where the characters become enslaved. Rife's control is not explicit, which makes it easier for him to enslave his followers; he is not generally perceived as a villain. It is only through careful research that Juanita is able to uncover the truth behind Rife's professional involvement. As Juanita discovers, Rife wishes to reverse the supposed effects of the Babel myth<sup>1</sup> by infecting every person in his world with Snow Crash. The Snow Crash virus causes those infected with the virus to babble incoherently, which is supposed to be reminiscent of the Sumerian language. By reuniting all language, Rife will be able to cross all the mental and physical boundaries that have been placed upon the world, and he would be the one in charge of it all. What I

will suggest is that Rife represents dangers that are lurking behind control in the posthuman world.

For the average user, Snow Crash just seems to turn his brain into a zombie-like state. The drug "penetrates the walls of brain cells and goes to the nucleus where the DNA is stored" (239) by acting "similar to a [steroid] . . . And then it does something to the nucleus of the cell. . . . Just like herpes" (250). The only person who takes Snow Crash on-screen in the novel is Reverend Dale T. Thorpe, pastor at one of the Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates franchise locations. He "holds a vial up to his left nostril. When the LED counter gets down to zero, it hisses, like air coming out of a tire valve. At the same time, he inhales deeply, sucking it all into his lungs. . . . He has slumped back in his leather swivel chair and is staring at a neon-framed blowup of Elvis, in his Army days, holding a rifle" (198). The reader never gets a definitive reason why one would want to use Snow Crash, aside from the curiosity why one would use a better-known drug such as heroin, considering the drugs appear to produce the same effects. Snow Crash just seems to be yet another element of Stephenson's society that his characters believe will not harm them, so they have no need to fear it. It appears, however, that Snow Crash, like heroin, is an incredibly addictive drug, especially to the religious officials who are pedaling it. For a hacker who becomes infected with Snow Crash in the Metaverse, however, his brain appears to suffer a mental snow crash as well. In this instance, the Snow Crash drug operates like a method of control inside another method of control. The effects of the drug/virus vary depending on the circumstance in which the individual becomes infected, but all the outcomes appear to lead to one becoming, to some degree, a babbling zombie under Rife's control.

The people that L. Bob Rife has already managed to control by way of the Pearly Gates are located at his headquarters known as the Raft. Rife's primary location is on "the deck of the aircraft carrier Enterprise, formerly of the U.S. Navy, now the personal yacht of L. Bob Rife" (114). According to Rife, "the function of the Raft is to bring more biomass. To renew America" (118). The former aircraft carrier's "top deck has been turned into an open-air refugee camp. It is swarming with Bangladeshis that L. Bob Rife plucked out of the Bay of Bengal . . . [D]own below, we see the first beginnings of the Raft: a relatively small collection of a few hundred boats that have glommed onto the Enterprise, hoping for a free ride to America (117). However, for an open-air environment in the middle of the ocean, the Raft is also a very controlled environment: "They have big guns mounted around the edge of the flight deck—big Gatling guns. . . . If people act up out on the Raft, they will make the problem go away" (370-71). The irony is that Rife is trying to simultaneously keep his own borders in place while fusing the people of the world together under his control. However, Rife encourages such conglomeration because the Raft is where most of his Snow Crash-infected followers gather. Sticking up from the back of their heads, they have "antennas [which] look like the ones on cop walkie-talkies: short, blunt, black rubber whips. They rise up from behind the ear" (325). Every machine is built to do a task; Rife is essentially turning his followers into machines. Norbert Wiener, who is regarded as the creator of cybernetics, introduces this idea of a feedback loop in his book, *The Human Use of Human Beings*: "This control of a machine on the basis of its actual performance rather than its expected performance is known as feedback, and involves sensory members which are actuated by motor members and perform the function of tell-tales or monitors—that is, of elements

which indicate a performance" (24). A feedback loop is the idea that when a human operates any sort of machine, whether it be a simple process such as turning a crank, or a complicated process such as operating a laptop computer, he is engaging in a method of communication, or feedback, with that machine. In *Snow Crash*, this feedback loop can be likened to the connection one has with his brain: a person's brain is the computer, he gives it a command, and in turn, his brain allows him to perform a process. By hacking into his followers' brains, Rife is interrupting the feedback loop and allowing himself to become, in effect, the computer that controls these people.

It is important to note here, however, that this information transfer, or feedback loop, as Wiener describes it, works both ways. It is not just the human functioning like a computer, but the computer functioning like a human as well. In her essay, "The Posthuman Body: Inscription and Incorporation in *Galatea 2.2* and *Snow Crash*," Hayles describes this as "Norbert Wiener's nightmare of a cybernetics used for tyrannical ends. A posthuman who lacks autonomy because his programming modules conflict with one another is a very different animal from a posthuman automaton who has had his consciousness hijacked by someone else" (264). The antennas allow the antenna people to communicate with one another, but at the expense of their sanity. The fact that they are "plugged in" should actually be a step in the direction towards technological progress; however, it actually acts as technological regression by giving L. Bob Rife an even deeper level of control over their consciousness. Wiener says that "[i]t is the purpose of Cybernetics to develop a language and techniques that will enable us indeed to attack the problem of control and communication in general, but also to find the proper repertory of ideas and techniques to classify their particular manifestations under certain concepts"

(17). L. Bob Rife is exploiting this use that Wiener explains of Cybernetics. He is not just seeking to understand how to use this technology, but to use it for the most nefarious means. He does not just want to achieve control, but complete domination through control. The antenna people have ceased to be autonomous beings and now act on behalf of Rife and the orders he gives them. The fact that they are plugged in should turn them on, but instead it turns them off. The antenna people have literally had their consciousness hijacked by Rife. By Hayles's definition, they have become posthuman. By my definition, they have become slaves to Rife.

Hayles does not necessarily perceive posthuman as being positive or negative, she is simply arguing that we are, in fact, posthuman. Similarly, Andy Clark believes that humans born today are already so integrated into the cybernetic world that we may all be considered posthuman. In his book, *Natural Born Cyborgs*, he says the important components of this structure “are the complex feedback loops that connect action-commands, bodily motions, environmental effects, and multisensory perceptual inputs. It is the two-way flow of influence between brain, body, and body that matters, and on the basis of which we construct (and constantly re-reconstruct) our sense of self, potential, and presence” (114). Clark is arguing that we are constantly connected to one another and to technology via feedback loops, but that we are always in control of these feedback loops. Clark argues that we, by virtue of our intelligence and sentience, are able to maintain complete control over our environment and ourselves. However, Stephenson challenges this notion by allowing his characters to become technologically enslaved. For the characters of *Snow Crash*, their posthumanity gives them the illusion that they are always in control. However, as I have said before, my argument revolves around the idea

that this illusion allows the characters to be more controlled by their environment and the people in positions of authority within those environments.

## II. Embedded Control in a Society of Corporate Franchises

*In this panoptic society of which incarceration is the omnipresent armature, the delinquent is not outside the law; he is, from the very outset, in the law, at the very heart of the law, or at least in the midst of those mechanisms that transfer the individual imperceptibly from discipline to the law, deviation to offense.*

—*Michel Foucault*  
Discipline and Punish

The structure of the carceral system in *Snow Crash* invades every aspect of the characters' lives. While they are not necessarily imprisoned, they live their lives in a world that functions like and appears similar to a prison. In the physical world, the United States has been divided into numerous geographic regions, each of which is owned by a corporation, such as Narcolumbia, Novicilia, The United States of America, and Mr. Lee's Greater Hong Kong. Even the major highways are corporately owned. For example, "Vista Road used to belong to the State of California and now is called Fairlanes, Inc. Rte. CSV-5. Its main competition used to be a U.S. highway and is now called Cruiseways, Inc. Rt. Cal-12" (Stephenson 7). While this may seem like an absolute instance of state- versus national-law, it's actually an explosion of franchisement because individual states do not even wield power, as evidenced by the State of California losing Visa Road to Fairlanes, Inc. This has completely divided the power in the country into separate, corporate entities. The franchisement in *Snow Crash* sets the stage for a completely controlled posthuman world.

The franchises are divided into franchise nations and "FOQNEs, Franchise-

Organized Quasi-National Entities" (14-15). The franchise nations are the separate, corporately owned countries into which the United States has been split. Because it is the responsibility of each of these franchise nations to defend their own borders, they each "have their own security force. You can bet that Metazania and New South Africa handle their own security. . . . Nova Sicilia has its own security, too. Narcolombia doesn't need security because people are scared just to drive past the franchise at less than a hundred miles an hour" (44-45). Mr. Lee's Greater Hong Kong, "a private, wholly extraterritorial, sovereign, quasi-national entity [FOQNE] not recognized by any other nationalities," (99) also has its own security system. Despite guns being illegal in this franchise, Mr. Lee has several levels of security, including "the Hong Kong robot security system" (83) and robot security dogs known as "Rat Things." The perimeter of Mr. Lee's Greater Hong Kong is surrounded by spikes that cause "Severe Tire Damage" (STD) if a visitor is not granted access before entering the franchise. Even the CosaNostra<sup>2</sup> Pizza Deliverators<sup>3</sup> are given guns to protect themselves (and the precious pizzas they carry). In such a society, people build walls around their houses, and they carry guns to protect themselves in their cars.

The spatial divisions in *Snow Crash* are eerily similar to the procedures taken during a time of plague, as Foucault describes in "Panopticism," which required "a spatial partitioning . . . the division of the town into distinct quarters. . . . Each street is placed under the authority of a syndic, who keeps it under surveillance" (195). However, the time period that Foucault is addressing is the seventeenth century. Stephenson's world is set in a posthuman future, but by Foucault's rationale, it has reverted to the closed society that comes with a fear of plague. Because the people who live in the world of *Snow*

*Crash* exist behind boundaries that keep them at work or at home, they appear to be afraid of everything and anything that might exist outside their boundaries. They are so hyper-focused on the danger that may be lurking outside their secure perimeters that they fail to see the danger that is lurking inside those perimeters. This division and partitioning of the physical world is, in theory, to protect the citizens of these areas. However, as I will explain, the false sense of security this division creates actually leaves the people in these areas vulnerable to the modern plague (Snow Crash) that is descending upon them.

While Foucault discusses the limitations of a society that is centered around its carceral system, and Baudrillard argues that our notion of power within these societies is only an illusion, Giles Deleuze offers an explanation of the effect these corporations have on the people living within these communities. In his essay "Postscript on Societies of Control," he says, "Marketing has become the center or the 'soul' of the corporation. We are taught that corporates have a soul, which is the most terrifying news in the world. The operation of markets is now the instrument of social control and forms the impudent breed of our masters" (7). The corporations and the franchises in *Snow Crash* are the government and business leaders of their society. They are essentially brainwashing their constituents into behaving by making them believe that marketing and franchises are appropriate sources for societal control. The people of this society must "buy in" to the idea of franchises because unless a people recognize a given organization as the peacekeeping authority, the society itself will never flourish. This idea is even more satirical in *Snow Crash* because one must literally buy, or purchase that goods or services that a franchise provides. For example, when Y. T., Hiro's kourier sidekick, gets arrested, the MetaCops offer to let her pay them off: "'Tell you what,' the second one says. 'You

pay us a trillion bucks and we'll take you to a Hoosegow. Then you can bargain with them.' 'Half a trillion,' Y.T. says. 'Seven hundred and fifty billion,' the MetaCop says." (Stephenson 50). Ultimately Y.T. is taken to the Clink, only because the Hoosegow is full. The control in *Snow Crash* undoubtedly stems from the commercialization and corporatization that Deleuze describes. There is no need to physically contain these people because they are owned in mind in addition to body. In *Snow Crash*, to be part of a franchise is to be part of society.

To maintain their (false) sense of security, most Americans in *Snow Crash* already live in secure divisions of what Stephenson calls "Burbclaves."<sup>4</sup> A company called The Mews at Windsor Heights (TMAWH) creates each of these Burbclaves in a geographically identical fashion. The method to create a Burbclave is so specific that "[w]hen creating a new Burbclave, TMAWH Development Corporation will chop down any mountain ranges and divert the course of any mighty rivers that might threaten to interrupt this street plan" (12). Each of the Burbclaves is designed exactly the same, which appears to be Stephenson mocking the idea of gated communities. Instead of just having gates at the entrances, the Burbclaves operate like individual countries. White Columns, for example, "has [an] eight-foot iron, robo-wrought, [fence] all the way around" (45). In each Burbclave, "[t]he border post is well lighted, the customs agents ready to frisk all comers—cavity search them if they are the wrong kind of people" (14). In "Panopticism," Foucault discusses a similar idea. During times of plague, the leaders of a town would place "at each of the town gates . . . an observation post; at the end of each street sentinels" (196). These measures were put into place to protect the citizens of a town from contracting the plague; however, in *Snow Crash*, the barriers surrounding

neighborhoods do little to keep the inhabitants safe. The plague, the Snow Crash virus, comes from places outside of the home and the neighborhood. No one in the novel is infected inside a Burbclave. One becomes infected with Snow Crash either in the Metaverse who through Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates. However, the Burbclaves are where we begin to see the shortcomings of security in *Snow Crash*.

One cannot enter a Burbclave without the proper documents, such as the passport one would need to enter a foreign country. The Burbclaves are "so insecure, that just about everything, like not mowing your lawn, or playing your stereo too loud, becomes a national security issue," (Stephenson 45). The disciplinary system is so ingrained into the culture of the society that it would seem entirely plausible for one of these offenses to turn a character into a felon. However, characters like Kouriers (message carriers) and Deliverators (pizza deliverers) are free to come and go without stopping at customs. A Kourier<sup>5</sup>, for instance, is dressed in such a way that "[h]er chest glitters like a general's with a hundred little ribbons and medals, except each rectangle is not a ribbon, it is a bar code. A bar code with an ID number that gets her into a different business, highway, or FOQNE" (Franchise-Organized Quasi-National Entity) (17). Should someone get ahold of such a piece of clothing, he would then have the unauthorized access of a Kourier. Therefore, the "security" of the Burbclaves is a façade, like many of the boundaries in *Snow Crash*. As Baudrillard explains in *Simulacra and Simulation*, "[T]he ideal of control is no longer that of transparency. . . . It is still, if not a system of confinement, at least a system of mapping" (29). In other words, a panopticon is no longer necessary. The ruling majority does not need to contain its inhabitants in such a way that allows for constant surveillance. Rather, the maintainers of the carceral system need only be able to

track its inhabitants. Like the docile bodies that Foucault discusses, the characters are under constant surveillance, which allows them to be monitored and disciplined at will. However, the gates and walls are only containing the characters who allow themselves to be contained like criminals in their own neighborhoods. An individual has the option to live in a space other than a Burbclave. For example, "Hiro Protagonist and Vitaly Chernobyl, roommates," share "a spacious 20-by-30 in a U-Stor-It in Inglewood, California" (19). They may not buy into the false sense of security provided by the Burbclaves, nor are they subjected to the omnipotent nature of said security system, but in turn, Hiro and Vitaly are almost constantly goggled in to the Metaverse to escape their physical enclosure. However, in the posthuman world, the heavy reliance on technology allows one's electronic footprint to be documented and tracked with much greater ease than one's physical presence. This is the posthuman idea of the "mapping" that Baudrillard discusses. There appears to be freedom from the material conditions in the posthuman world, but this freedom through technology is only cleverly disguised control. One may choose to live outside of the Burbclaves' control, but chances are that he is living in a much more controlled environment, even if he doesn't realize it.

Despite their false nature, the Burbclaves act more like institutions of incarceration than the actual penal system in *Snow Crash*. While the Burbclaves are designed to keep their inhabitants within the walls of the neighborhoods, the franchises associated with the penal system are designed like businesses for the purpose of making money. MetaCops Unlimited, for example, is a "private peace organization" (44) whose slogan reads, "DIAL 1-800-THE COPS All Major Credit Cards" (44). The other two security divisions mentioned in the novel are the smaller WorldBeat Security who

"handles more upscale contracts . . . [and] supposedly has a bigger espionage arm" (45) and The Enforcers, who, according to rumor, "under their uniforms, wear T-shirts bearing the unofficial Enforcer of arms: a fist holding a nightstick, emblazoned with the words SUE ME" (45). Even the jails are privately owned organizations. What is ironic about these crime-stopping organizations is that they are more focused on making money than on actually keeping the peace. Once again, Stephenson is poking fun at his characters' illusion of safety and the privately owned hotel-cum-jail that is designed to act as an institution to incarcerate criminals. They lock themselves behind iron gates, yet their cops are for sale.

The jails in *Snow Crash*, The Clink and the Hoosegow<sup>6</sup>, are equally as laughable as the cops themselves. The Hoosegow's logo, "a saguaro cactus with a black cowboy hat resting on top of it at a jaunty angle, is brand-new and clean" (50). It's not exactly the image one associates with a jail, nor with the "wild west," for that matter. The Hoosegow sounds more like a campy hotel. With a theme and a logo, one would be more likely to assume the Hoosegow is some form of entertainment, rather than a building designed for incarceration. Every physical space in *Snow Crash* has become commercialized with the intention of making money. Like the police franchises, the incarceration franchises are primarily focused on the business end of their organization. The text on The Hoosegow's sign says, "THE HOOSEGOW: Premium incarceration and restraint services: We welcome busloads!" (50). Like most of the elements of *Snow Crash*, The Hoosegow is a caricature of the institution it's meant to represent. While it does function as a jail, its primary purpose is to give the owners of the franchise an income. The facade of a carceral building can be likened to Baudrillard's argument that the "real" does not exist

because we live in a world of simulation. In *Simulacra and Simulation*, he explains that

The imaginary was the alibi of the real, in a world dominated by the reality principle. Today, it is the real that has become the alibi of the model, in a world controlled by the principle of simulation. And, paradoxically, it is the real that has become our true utopia—but a utopia that is no longer in the realm of the possible, that can only be dreamt of as one would dream of a lost object. (122-23)

Initially, according to Baudrillard, people existed in the real world and looked to the world of the imaginary as an escape from the real world through books and stories. Today, he argues, the real world has become imaginary because we exist in a world of simulation. His famous Disneyland example<sup>7</sup> illustrates the idea that we cover ourselves with idealistic notions and situations to hide from the falseness of our reality. In other words, we live in a falsely idealistic society. The reality of our society is no more "real" than the character of Cinderella that an actress portrays in Disneyland. Our belief in the reality of the simulation is what makes it real to us. Because the characters in *Snow Crash* buy into the nature of the Hoosegow, they have allowed it to become the carceral institution it believes itself to be. The Hoosegow may be a campy, flimsy representation of a jail, but it functions as a jail in the society of *Snow Crash* nonetheless.

The Feds are a prime example of citizens who are completely owned by their franchise. Located in The United States of America, the Feds "still operate in Flatland"<sup>8</sup>. None of this three-dimensional stuff, no goggles, no stereo sound. The computers are all basic flat-screen two-dimensional numbers" (Stephenson 282). Initially, the Fed appears to be the anti-Metaverse contingent for the benefit of its people, for as Baudrillard

explains, "It still makes us feel secure today to evaluate this stock of what is real . . . There will always be something to liberate, to enjoy, and to exchange with others through words: now that's real, that's substantial, that's prospective stock. That's power" (46-47). The Fed is located in "Fedland, [which] used to be the VA Hospital and a bunch of other Federal buildings . . . It has a barrier around it, a perimeter fence put up by stringing chain link fabric, concertina wire, heaps of rubble, and Jersey barriers from one building to the next" (Stephenson 174). The Feds expect a lot from their employees because they have a "fetish for loyalty—since they don't make a lot of money or get a lot of respect, you have to prove you're personally committed and that you don't care about those trappings" (175).

According to Tim Blackmore, author of "Agent of Civility: The Librarian in Neal Stephenson's Snow Crash," "[i]n an age where microsersfs toil in cubicle farms, 'service' can be a code word for thinly-veiled slavery," (14) which is exactly what occurs in the Fed. Fed workers are willing to completely sacrifice themselves for their paycheck. When they arrive, Fed workers park in their "own little numbered slot[s]," (Stephenson 279) then they are searched before entering the building. The Fed operates like a well-oiled machine, with each of their workers acting as a part of that machine. But the slavery of working for the Fed is anything but thinly veiled.

The Fed is run by "the Executive Branch General Operational Command, EBGOC, which is responsible for "[t]he FBI, Federal Marshalls, Secret service, . . . Special Forces . . . the Army, Navy, and Air Force . . . but they're all under the command of EBGOC. . . . EBGOC claims the right to go anywhere, anytime, within the original borders of the United States of America" (176). The Fed workers behave so perfectly that

they are almost akin to robots. For example, "Feds don't smoke. Feds generally don't overeat" (280). Both the pressure from one's coworkers and the stringent regulations from the Fed itself are what keep its workers in line. It is no longer completely necessary to lock someone inside a building because the pressure from their peers is enough to keep them in line. The fear of losing one's job at the Fed is enough to keep her from protesting the cavity search he is obliged to submit to daily. The Fed operates much more like a prison than the actual prisons.

We may not recognize our physical boundaries as being as regulated as those in *Snow Crash*, but we are still conforming to the same idea of social regulation, despite the permeability of these boundaries. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault explains the effect this disciplinary society has on its citizens. He says, "one can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social 'quarantine', to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of 'panopticism.' . . . It assures an infinitesimal distribution of the power relations" (216). The characters in *Snow Crash* are completely controlled by the environments in which they live, due to the disciplinary nature of their society. Claire Sponsler author of the article, "Beyond the Ruins: The Geopolitics of Urban Decay and Cybernetic Play" writes, "Ruined cities become a metaphor for the disintegration of the body as well as a way of valuing cyberspace, which is, after all, an escape from the constraints of the physical world" (263). Depending on a character's socioeconomic situation, he is contained within a physical boundary. If he lives in a Burbelave, as many of the middle-class characters do, he is literally locked into his neighborhood. But this is not completely unlike our world. We may not live in such explicitly formed boundaries, but the boundaries are still there.

For a character in *Snow Crash*, then, his only escape from the physical boundaries of his world is available by goggling in to the Metaverse.

### III. Popping the Bubble of the Metaverse

*You spend too much time goggled in. . . . Try a little  
Reality, man.*

—*Y.T. to Hiro*  
Snow Crash

Like the physical environments of *Snow Crash*, the Metaverse is also pervaded by the carceral system of the novel's society, despite the characters' belief that the Metaverse gives its users a higher degree of freedom than the physical world. Stephenson initially describes the Metaverse as "a computer-generated universe that [one's] computer . . . draw[s] onto his goggles and pump[s] into his earphones. In the lingo, this imaginary place is known as the Metaverse" (24). To access the Metaverse, one needs a computer and Metaverse goggles that wrap around one's head to accommodate the attached headphones. Once he is "goggled in," he traverses the virtual world by use of an avatar he has either created himself or purchased in the store. From the largest institution of ownership (L. Bob Rife) to the smallest (the social standards governing avatars) there are various degrees of ownership and control in the Metaverse. Although not overtly obvious to the characters, these measures of control in *Snow Crash* serve to keep the users of the Metaverse in line in the same way that the government functions in Reality. One cannot exist in any world, virtual or otherwise, without becoming a part of it. That world, by virtual of its existence, encapsulates its inhabitants one way or another.

For the users who cannot afford a proper avatar, or lack the skills to create an original, they can "run down to the computer-games section of the local Wal-Mart and

buy a copy of Brandy. The user can select three breast sizes: improbable, impossible, and ludicrous . . . Clint is just the male counterpart of Brandy" (37). Brandy is clearly a play on the popular Barbie dolls, which are just as unrealistic<sup>9</sup> as the Brandy avatars. Kim Toffoletti, author of the book, *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture, and the Posthuman Body*, explains the shortcomings of a feminine culture obsessed with the image of Barbie. She says:

Figurations such as Barbie function to encourage alternative understandings of the body and self as transformative, rather than bound to an established system of meaning. She is a precursor to the posthuman; a type of plastic transformer who embodies the potential for identity to be mutable and unfixd. (59)

The Metaverse is precisely the place in which one would have the desire and the ability to change his or her appearance according to a societal standard for beauty. However, like Barbie, the avatars in the Metaverse transcend what it means to be human and, as Toffoletti explains, emerge in a posthuman era. But this posthumanity only leads us closer to becoming part of a completely controlled society.

The users of the Metaverse exist in a virtual world that is owned and operated by people and organizations outside of the users' command. Therefore, they must adhere to the limitations set forth by the computer code that allows the Metaverse to exist, as well as the social mores contained within the virtual community. If one does not have his own computer, he may access the Metaverse from a public terminal, but public? avatars "are rendered in jerky, grainy black and white," (41) which looks like an animated photocopy of one's face. Because the entire environment is virtual, a user can choose to make his

avatar look like nearly anything he wants. The avatars in the Metaverse generally adhere to virtual societal standards, but the avatars are still digital constructions and do not necessarily reflect the actual appearance of a user. For example, "If you're ugly, you can make your avatar beautiful. If you've just gotten out of bed, your avatar can still be wearing beautiful clothes and professionally applied makeup" (36). Rock Stars "have the hairdos that rock stars can only wear in their dreams" (66). However, one's avatar can only go as far as the limitations of the world allow. According to "[t]he Street protocol, . . . your avatar can't be any taller than you are. This is to prevent people from walking around a mile high" (41). Stephenson gives no reason for the distinction between the ability to appear more beautiful rather than taller in the Metaverse, but perhaps this is because height is quantifiable. It is possible to put a restriction on height because it can be measured, but beauty is subject to the perspective of the observer. For example, the code that constructs the exclusive Metaverse club, The Black Sun, designates that "[P]eople can't pass through the door because they haven't been invited" (Stephenson 39-40). It appears that Metaverse users have nearly unlimited freedom because the Metaverse is a virtual world, but this freedom is actually the virtual control exerted upon the Metaverse users from sources both in and out of the virtual world.

One cannot escape the disciplinary nature of the society in *Snow Crash* whether in or out of the Metaverse because he will first and foremost *always* be physically present in Reality, even if his mind is not, and because he must still abide by the rules that govern and structure the Metaverse. What a user buys into when he goggles in is the belief that he has unlimited freedom in the virtual world. Blackmore suggests that the user is buying more than the illusion of freedom that he actually manages to escape the chaos of reality

into the structure of Metaverse. However, as Deleuze explains, we have moved past such a dichotomy of good/bad: "[w]e no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become 'dividuals,' and masses, samples, data, marks or 'banks'" (5). In the posthuman world, there is no more sense of an in-group and an out-group. The focus is not on who has the power. Instead, the focus is on marketing and business. People are now just units that need to be moved in a certain way. For the owners of the franchises in *Snow Crash*, whether they be the MetaCops or the Fed or Mr. Lee's Greater Hong Kong, people exist to work for the franchises, to move and purchase goods, and to provide services. There is no escape from this sort of existence in the Metaverse because the societal mentality that constructs Reality carries over to the virtual world. The focus is still on franchisement and profit generation. Blackmore argues that "*Snow Crash* operates around binaries: the lawless and chaotic outside (America) and the ordered rule-bound inside (Metaverse); Reality (the physical world) and the real (Metaverse); information poor and rich. The inside/outside binary suggests that only in the inside world (Metaverse) is there any safety from the predatory outside world" (para. 3). Blackmore is juxtaposing Reality with Metaverse to argue that the Metaverse is the only place where safety from this division can be found. What his argument fails to address is that despite the many levels of ownership in Reality, there are still rules and regulations, depending on where one is located. The rules also differ in the Metaverse, such as the social acceptance of a particular type of avatar in one place rather than another.

The consumerism that controls the lives of people in Reality is the same consumerism that controls them in the Metaverse. The main area of the Metaverse, the

Street, "the Broadway, the Champs Élysées of the Metaverse," is the best place to advertise, despite its apparent lack of order and control because it is the main road in the Metaverse. All an entrepreneur needs to do is "[p]ut in a sign or a building on the Street and the hundred million richest, hippest, best-connected people on earth will see it every day of their lives" (26). It is much more lucrative than advertising in Reality because there are no guidelines that prohibit any kind of content.

The more computer skills someone possesses, the more "currency" he has, which is why the Hackers are so highly regarded in the Metaverse—they have the most currency. Hiro has access to a piece of software called "Bigboard," which is "all unauthorized data that Hiro is not supposed to have. But Hiro is not some bimbo actor coming here to network. He is a hacker. If he wants some information, he steals it right out of the guts of the system—gossip ex machina" (55). For someone like Hiro, a computer hacker, he has the ability to create his own house within the Metaverse, thus exerting what he believes to be his control over the virtual space. Hiro may live in a U-Stor-It in reality, but in the Metaverse, he "has a house in a neighborhood just off the busiest part of the Street. It is a very old neighborhood by Street standards. . . . By getting in on [the business of real estate] early, Hiro's buddies . . . got very rich off of it. . . . That's why Hiro has a nice big house in the Metaverse but has to share a 20-by-30 in Reality" (26). Hiro lives off of the belief that he can control his virtual world, and therefore maintain a sense of power, despite the appearance that he is unable to control his environment in the real world.

In the same way that beauty functions in Reality, Metaverse users are categorized by their quality of the avatars, thereby precluding certain users from access to elite clubs.

The Black Sun is the most famous and exclusive club in the virtual world, which aside from the Street, is one of the biggest institutions that controls the users in and around it. The Black Sun functions almost like a Metaverse franchise. Like the franchises in Reality, even the users who have enough clout and/or money to become members of The Black Sun are still subject to the rules of the club. To keep The Black Sun running smoothly, Da5id, the famous hacker who created the club, also built daemons into the system code, which function like bouncers. The security daemons are the only kind of security system discussed in the Metaverse:

"Daemon" is an old piece of jargon from the UNIX operating system, where it referred to a piece of low-level utility software, a fundamental part of the operating system. . . . That is, if your personal computer is infected with viruses, and attempts to spread them via The Black Sun, you had better keep one eye on the ceiling. (55)

The daemon with which the reader is most likely familiar is the Mailer-daemon, which is responsible for returning undeliverable email messages to the sender. But in The Black Sun, the daemons are similar to the MetaCops in Reality. Bouncer daemons are the "[o]nly thing [with] the ability to shove people around . . . inside The Black Sun" (76). Once again, the code that constructs both the Metaverse and The Black Sun exerts a greater level control over Metaverse users than any control they can exert over the virtual environment.

Hiro and the other hackers have access to a vast amount of knowledge, which gives them even more of an illusion of control over the Metaverse. Juanita gives to Hiro two incredibly valuable pieces of software: Earth and The Librarian. Earth "is a piece of

CIC software" which looks like "[a] globe about the size of a grapefruit, a perfectly detailed rendition of Planet Earth . . . It is the user interface that CIC uses to keep track of every bit of spatial information that it owns—all the maps, weather data, architectural plans, and satellite surveillance stuff" (106). The Librarian, conversely, looks and interacts with Hiro like any Metaverse avatar: "The librarian daemon looks like a pleasant, fiftyish, silver-haired, bearded man with bright blue eyes, wearing a V-neck sweater over a work shirt, with a coarsely woven, tweedy-looking wool tie. . . . The Librarian is the only piece of CIC software that costs even more than Earth; the only thing he can't do is think" (Stephenson 107). The Librarian, says Blackmore, "enables people to become decent humans" (21) although he functions more like an actual library with a librarian interface due to his vast supply of knowledge. With Earth and the Librarian, Hiro has access to nearly all the information he could need or want. As Sabine Heuser explains the importance of such knowledge in her article, "(En)gendering Artificial Intelligence in Cyberspace." In the posthuman world, "knowledge is thus reformulated as the meaningful organization of information, even though 'meaning' remains open and devoid of consensus" (178). What one does with his knowledge is relative to his beliefs. Hiro uses his knowledge to defeat Rife, who uses his knowledge for control and power.

However, the hackers' control too, is a façade because it only gives the illusion of freedom. Sure, any user can put up a giant billboard that showcases his opinion or his product, but ultimately, L. Bob Rife has the ability to take down said billboard or to shut down the Metaverse completely. It is imperative, then, that Metaverse users play by the rules of their virtual world. They can mostly do what they want, within the confines of

their society. Lisa Swanstrom provides a discussion of the encapsulating environmental constructions of *Snow Crash*, which, in my perspective, lead to further control in the novel. In her article "Capsules and Nodes and Ruptures and Flows: Circulating Subjectivity in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*," she explains that "The ability to create a space in the Metaverse that is entirely independent from the financial and physical constraints of the real world is another subversion of the social structures in *Snow Crash*. For some, this ability creates a positive—and even emancipatory—environment that allows them to overcome physical limitation" (66). But what I argue is this "emancipatory environment" is only a façade. Yes, certain characters, like the disabled Ng, are able to free themselves from their physical constraints within the Metaverse, but this is only putting them back into the constraints of the virtual world. By the very nature of a virtual reality, if one does not have the necessary knowledge to code said world, he is unable to manipulate it. Swanstrom illustrates this notion, saying, "Yet although the Metaverse is a space where its visitors—and their dogs—can take on different physical forms, travel wherever they like, on whatever vehicles they choose, to whichever destinations they find most favorable, thereby undermining the rigid codes of fragmentation that define the outside world, it also participates obliquely in the same logic of encapsulation" (67). They can overcome the physical limitations of Reality in the Metaverse, but they still must abide by the rules that govern the limitations of the virtual world. A user must accept that the control the Metaverse code exerts upon him is more powerful than the control he exerts over the Metaverse. For example, "You can't just materialize anywhere in the Metaverse, like Captain Kirk beaming down from on high. That would be confusing and irritating to the people around you. It would break the

metaphor" (Stephenson 36). Having one's own space allows him this privacy and the illusion of control. It is therefore unsurprising that the hackers who originally built the Metaverse are the ones who exert the most control over the virtual world. No matter where one finds that he is most comfortable—be it in Reality or in the Metaverse, he is still controlled by the very physical (or virtual) laws of that world.

The Librarian and Earth are constructions of the Metaverse—Hiro cannot access the information unless he is goggled in, which is an interesting idea that Blackmore does not address. Blackmore's focus, rather, is on the idea that in such a posthuman world, the library functions as a "safety from the predatory outside world" (3). He continues, saying, "The Metaverse, while it reflects the corrupt outer world, is less a place of disaster, rage and murder, at least until the advent of the Snow Crash virus" (5). He believes that the virtual constraints of the Metaverse keep it safe from the majority of the conflict in Reality. What his argument fails to consider, however, is that it is the power of information that L. Bob Rife, the villain of the story, is using to gain control. The information that Hiro receives from his friend and fellow hacker, Juanita is all second- and third-hand. Rife has already accessed and stored this information; Juanita is just following his trail. No matter how much information Juanita and Hiro amass, L. Bob Rife still holds all the cards. He still controls the Metaverse and a majority stock in The Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates. The control the hackers believe they maintain is as much of an illusion as the Metaverse itself.

What the hackers fail to consider is that the Metaverse controls them just as much, if not more, than they control it. While they are able to *manipulate* the virtual environment, they are not able to alter the *structure* of the Metaverse. The technology of

the Metaverse still holds more power than the hackers who manage the technology. In his book *The Human Use of Human Beings*, Norbert Wiener discusses the influence technology has had on humans. He explains, "When I control the actions of another person, I communicate a message to him, and although this message is in the imperative mood, the technique of communication does not differ from that of a message of fact" (16). The message Wiener is discussing could be as innocuous as "Go get the mail," but it still culminates in the same result: the person to whom one is speaking walks outside to retrieve the mail. In this circumstance, one person is controlling the actions of another, even if neither party realizes this fact. What makes it even more subversive is that the command is usually spoken in the same tone that would convey a non-order, such as, "The mail is on the table." Rife has already infected the majority of the parishioners of his megachurch and he conspires to "infect all of them at once. He's going to burn their minds" (Stephenson 438) by encouraging them to gather at an amphitheater for a supposed benefit for Da5id. Not only does Rife control the hackers who work for him, but once he infects them with Snow Crash, he will control them like robots. The Metaverse users are no longer safe from control of Reality. Through L. Bob Rife, this control has made its way into the virtual world, starting with the most powerful Metaverse users.

The hackers that no longer work as freelancers like Hiro and Da5id work for corporations like the ones L. Bob Rife owns. Now, "software comes out of factories, and hackers are, to a greater or lesser extent, assembly-line workers" (39). L. Bob Rife is, once again, behind this undertaking to more or less enslave the hackers for his own purposes. Unsurprisingly, Rife seeks to control every single aspect of the hackers' lives, a

throwback to the Taylorism and Fordism monitoring of the early 1900s. Fed up with this scrutiny, "a number of Rife's programmers, the people who made his systems run, got together and formed a union—unheard of, for hackers—and filed a suit against Rife, claiming that he had placed audio and video bugs in their homes, in fact placed all of them under twenty-four-hour surveillance" (115). What is even more terrifying is that Rife is using the technology that he owns (the Metaverse) to accomplish a large portion of this mission. L. Bob Rife already owns a vast majority of the franchises in Reality, which is arguably what makes him so powerful: he is the one who actually owns and runs the Metaverse. Rife's headquarters is "[a] black cube exactly twenty miles on a side," (212) which lacks a door, but has security daemons protecting the entire perimeter. Hiro manages to break into this fortress and realizes "that he has found . . . the boiler room of the entire Metaverse" (436). The inside of "Rifeland is a vast, brightly lit space occupied by elementary shapes done up in primary colors" (435). It is not public knowledge that Rife owns the Metaverse, nor that his boiler room exists. Aside from the Metaverse, Rife contributes a large majority of his fortune to the Reverend Wayne's organizations, and has given more than \$150 million to various departments of Rife Bible College. Rife has been inserting himself, little by little, into nearly every aspect of the franchised society in *Snow Crash* to ensure that he controls as much of it as possible with the people he controls none the wiser.

At an earlier time, hackers were an anarchistic group, working for themselves on their own terms. Their most basic nature was to cause chaos in security systems. As a computer hacker, Hiro is considered one of the most powerful users, due to his ability to customize his avatar as well as virtual space. As in any environment, power and success

follows those who have control. Hiro lives in his idealized reality through the Metaverse. As Blackmore points out, the number of people who actually have access to the Metaverse is paltry compared to the number of people in the world. He says that because so many people lack access to the Metaverse, "the chasm between those with access and those without has become a virtual abyss" (9). However, this divide only serves to alienate those on the outside, and Da5id's arrogance about his status and his ability is what ultimately leads him to suffer an infection from the Snow Crash virus after accepting hypercard (which resembles an electronic business card) from a Brandy. As a result of reading the hyper card, Da5id's brain suffers a snow crash because computer hackers are able to read binary code. Da5id ends up strapped to a hospital bed babbling nonsense. When Hiro goes to see him, "[t]he syllables roll off his tongue like drool" (Stephenson 189). Da5id's consciousness seems to have been destroyed. The binary code of the virus infects hackers more than the average person; it essentially ruins their brains, rather than just getting them high.

The hackers' ability to manipulate and control the Metaverse is what leaves them susceptible to such an attack. Because they view themselves as invincible, or similar to Gods (for their ability to write computer code) in the Metaverse, they do not perceive viruses such as Snow Crash (or a drug, as it's pedaled in the Metaverse) as potential threats. Had Da5id been more vigilant about his security in the Metaverse, rather than assuming his safety, he could have escaped Snow Crash infection. But is the perceived freedom of the Metaverse that encourages the hackers to study computer code. If they knew or believed that they were under the surveillance of L. Bob Rife, they might be less likely to pursue hacking as a hobby. The control of a society does not encourage dissent,

per se, but as I explained earlier, this control is only an illusion and can therefore be undermined at any moment. The power that the governing body holds is an illusion that can be maintained only because the citizens of the society allow themselves to be controlled. Foucault describes these docile bodies as being “part of a multi-segmentary machine,” (164) which, as we know can only operate if all parts are working in unison. Therefore, should one of the parts begin to break down, such as the dissent of the hackers, the entire society will collapse.

Kelly Wisecup is the first person to focus on the idea of Rife's control. She argues that "humans in *Snow Crash* lack free will" and can therefore "be viewed as machines" (860). Wisecup's argument stems from N. Katherine Hayles's idea that one gives up his autonomy when he becomes posthuman by allowing himself to become integrated with the computer in such a way that he can no longer function without the use of the computer. However, it seems to be a limiting statement to assume that all characters in *Snow Crash* lack free will. In his article "Hacking the Brainstem: Postmodern Metaphysics and Stephenson's *Snow Crash*," David Porush discusses the absolute autonomy of Juanita, who, after allowing L. Bob Rife to implant an antenna in her skull "has succeeded in finding the key to transcendence, finding the same creative trapdoor in the mind that *Snow Crash* effects in a disastrous way. She uses the cybernetic mechanics of language to hack the brain . . ." (68). Juanita essentially elevates herself to a level of a God with absolute power, the likes of which the other hackers believe they already possess, because she has found a way to hack the brain itself, arguably the most complicated machine-like structure in existence. By submitting her autonomy to L. Bob Rife at the onset, Juanita does initially suggest that to become posthuman is to relinquish

one's free will. However, Juanita performs what one might believe to be impossible, which is reclaiming one's autonomy after the transcendence to posthumanity.

Unfortunately for Porush's argument, Juanita is the only character in the novel that is able to hack the brainstem. Even then, she does so understand how the system works—Hiro, not Juanita, is the one who ultimately destroys L. Bob Rife. Juanita is responsible for collecting information, but she does little to *act* on the knowledge she gains outside of her own mind and body. She brings the issue and the solution to light, but it is ultimately Hiro who acts on the information.

Like Hiro, some of the characters in *Snow Crash* rely so heavily on the Metaverse that they don't need to be under Rife's control to be completely controlled by their technology. These individuals, such as Central Intelligence Corporate (CIC)<sup>10</sup> (formally the CIA) security guards who have been dubbed "gargoyles," have submitted so completely to their posthumanism that they no longer seem to care what levels of control are being exerted upon them because they believe that through technology they now have complete control over their environment. Even though gargoyles physically exist in Reality, they are never fully present in the real world because they are constantly "adrift in a laser-drawn world, scanning retinas in all directions, doing background checks on everyone within a thousand yards, seeing everything in visual light, infrared, millimeter-wave radar, and ultrasound all at once" (Stephenson 125). Because the gargoyles simultaneously exist in the Metaverse and Reality, they cannot be fully present in either world. As a result, they become veritable slaves to their technology. But as the French philosopher Julien Offray de La Mettrie explains, "To be a machine and to feel, to think and to be able to distinguish right from wrong, like blue from yellow—in a word to be

born with intelligence and a sure instinct for morality and to be only an animal—are thus things which are no more contradictory than to be an ape or a parrot and to be able to give oneself pleasure" (35). Some characters, like Hiro when he climbs aboard L. Bob Rife's Raft, may assume "full gargoyle mode: enhanced visible light with false-color infrared, plus millimeter-wave radar" (Stephenson 414) for various purposes. However, despite being similar to a computer, it is still a human doing the thinking behind the machine. But although the human is controlling the computer, he is still allowing the computer to complete some of his tasks, which means he must have given up a measure of his control. When one enters the virtual world, he is manipulating the environment around him, but ultimately, he is still part of a world created by, and thus ultimately controlled by, a computer.

However, Stephenson uses his characters to take the idea of being controlled by a computer one step further. Ng Security Industries manufactures cyborg security dogs known as "Rat Things," which Mr. Lee's Greater Hong Kong employs in their franchises. Donna Haraway, author of the influential essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," argues that it is within our best interest to recognize the technological progress of the world and how it has shaped both humans and the world around us. Because humans have such a close relationship with animals and the environment, technological progress would naturally extend beyond humanity. Stephenson's Rat Things, such as "Ng Security Industries Semi-Autonomous Guard Unit B-782 . . . who thinks of himself as a pit bullterrier named Fido," (Stephenson 249) appear to be sentient beings; therefore, they are more than capable of becoming cyborgs. Like his Rat Things, Nipponese businessman Ng is also akin to a cyborg. He physically exists in his van, which "is eight feet high and wider than

it is high, which would have made it a wide load in the old days when they had laws" (224). His body, "from the temples downward, is encased in an enormous goggle/mask/headphone/feeding-tube unit, held onto his head by smart straps that are constantly tightening and loosening themselves to keep the device comfortable and properly positioned," (225) but he's always goggled into the Metaverse, where he lives in "a French colonial villa in the prewar village of My Tho in the Mekong Delta" (221). Even his franchise "has a whole floor of a mile-high neon skyscraper near Port One, right in the middle of Downtown. Like everything else in the Metaverse, it's open twenty-four hours, because it's always business hours somewhere in the world" (391). However, his freedom is only a façade because he is still limited to what money can buy him in the Metaverse. For example, he cannot perform certain actions, such as touching other people, in the Metaverse. He is still held to the restraints of Reality, no matter how much money and power he has in the Metaverse.

When one goggles in to the Metaverse, he fuses himself to a machine, thus creating a man/machine cooperative. But despite this illusion of freedom, no matter where or how one goggles in to the Metaverse, he is still controlled by the various societal and literal constraints associated with the virtual reality system. For example, Hiro could "strike up a conversation: Hiro in the U-Stor-It in L.A. and . . . four teenagers probably on a couch in a suburb of Chicago, each with their own laptop. But they probably won't talk to each other, any more than they would in Reality" (36). The social constraints are more obvious than the physical constraints, but both exert a significant measure of control over the people in Reality and the Metaverse. Some people are comfortable with this control, like Ng and the gargoyles, and some find goggling in to be

too extreme, such as YT. The difference between the two is that the Metaverse gives its users the illusion of reality while exerting a potentially greater measure of control than that of Reality. Even L. Bob Rife's franchise can be infiltrated, as evidenced by Hiro's intrusion into the boiler room of the Metaverse. This notion of freedom and control is a circular system; the areas that appear free are actually monitored, and the people who seem invincible are actually just as vulnerable as those who have no knowledge of computer code.

#### IV. The Limitation of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

*Ninety-nine percent of everything that goes on in most Christian churches has nothing whatsoever to do with the actual religion. Intelligent people all notice this sooner or later, and they conclude that the entire one hundred percent is bullshit, which is why atheism is connected with being intelligent in people's minds.*

—*Juanita*  
Snow Crash

The levels of control in *Snow Crash* are interlaced and panoptic, much like a frame narrative of control. At the outside is the physical world of *Snow Crash*, and the physical boundaries and borders of Reality. Then the Metaverse is located within Reality, but still containing its own levels of control and regulation. However, surrounding both Reality and the Metaverse is the concept of franchisement and consumerism. Because the characters in *Snow Crash* exist in a posthuman world, they are less likely to perceive their technology as a danger, as I've explained in previous chapters. However, this ignorance allows them to be controlled by their leaders and environment even more because they believe that their technology gives them freedom, when in fact their technology is what gives their carceral system its strength. The carceral system in *Snow Crash* pervades even the religious institutions, but this is perhaps the most dangerous and most controlled environment in the novel. In this chapter I will argue that the religion in *Snow Crash* controls the characters as much as—if not more than—the other structures of their society.

Religion is the primary vehicle by which L. Bob Rife gains control over the

people and environments (virtual or otherwise) in *Snow Crash*. The megachurch in *Snow Crash* is Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates, which is yet another franchise. The name of the church is a play on St. Peter's Pearly Gates, the imagery assigned to the gateway into Heaven in biblical tradition. St. Peter's Pearly Gates are a gateway to the eternity of the pious; Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates, on the other hand, are a gateway to control disguised by the implication of saving one's soul through the church. These gates actually lead to one surrendering his freedom. Like its name, this Pentecostal franchise is a bastardized version of Christianity. Its holy trinity consists of Jesus, Elvis<sup>11</sup>, and Reverend Wayne. Because L. Bob Rife already has Reverend Wayne under his thumb, the holy trinity might as well be Jesus, Elvis, and L. Bob Rife. The worshippers of this church "do their penance and speak in tongues below the neon Elvis" (240). By providing funding to various organizations (Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates, Reverend Wayne Bedford, Rife Bible College, etc.) he is securing himself a stake in these organizations and the people associated with them. Rife's involvement with these organizations is as a silent investor, however, which makes his control over the organizations and the people involved more covert. Rife's investment, and therefore control, is not readily apparent to the characters unless one is looking for Rife's involvement in these organizations. Rife also gains a measure of control over the information that these organizations disseminate as well as how it is disseminated, giving a majority of the control over the people and the environment of *Snow Crash*.

At Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates, the Reverend and his parishioners are all infected with Snow Crash, reducing them to babbling zombies and placing them directly under L. Bob Rife's control. Reverend Wayne's parishioners become infected with Snow

Crash at "the local Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates franchise" with its "pseudo-Gothic stained-glass arches" (8). Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates is no more an authentic church than the Hoosegow is a jail. Both franchises are built with a theme in mind. In the case of the Pearly Gates, the theme is along the lines of a traditional Catholic church, but like all the other franchises in *Snow Crash*, it need only look like the institution after which it is modeled, and it must be easily reproduced. Undoubtedly, the faux stained glass is mass-produced and replicated exactly in every Pearly Gates franchise. Baudrillard says that "The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control—and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these" (2). Like the other franchises in *Snow Crash*, Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates is only a caricature of a cathedral that may be reproduced as easily as the cookie-cutter Burbelaves. The religious franchise doesn't need to be an accurate representation of a church—it only needs to look like and function as one. The church isn't any more authentic than its fake stained-glass. The façade of church's physical appearance only serves to mimic the illusion of the church operating as a religious place of worship. The church building is comparable to a mousetrap: the mouse walks onto the trap for a piece of cheese, but finds himself trapped and killed by the metal bar that slams down on top of him. Similarly, a church-goer of Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates first allows himself to be indoctrinated into the Church, and from there he becomes addicted to Snow Crash, making Rife's control over him inescapable.

Rife's control over the Reverend Wayne, Snow Crash and the Metaverse is just the entry point to his control over the entire world. The seduction of such power, Baudrillard says, is what leads one to dominate others. He explains that

We must say that power seduces, but not in the vulgar sense of a complicit form of desire on the part of those who are dominated—this comes down to basing it in the desire of others, which is really going overboard in taking people for idiots—no, power seduces by that reversibility that haunts it, and upon which a minimal symbolic cycle is set up. (Baudrillard 43-44)

Baudrillard is arguing that the desire for power is so intense, so corrupt that one who desires power will foster that desire in those who one wishes to control, rather than encouraging them to desire being controlled. It's much more nefarious than just setting up a binary of rich/poor. It's a matter of convincing others that they share your desires. L. Bob Rife's scheme is taking Baudrillard's argument to a new level; he is actually "taking people for idiots," but harnessing their desire in order to wield control over their minds. He is using the seduction of his power, and the promise of gaining some sort of power through the use of the Snow Crash drug to gain control over these people. Through L. Bob Rife, Stephenson has simplified Baudrillard's explanation of power to its most simplistic sense.

L. Bob Rife is trying to gain control of the world by creating a universal language by reversing the Babel myth, which would reduce language to babble that only he could understand, essentially making him the most powerful man in the world.<sup>12</sup> According to the myth, the citizens of the ancient city of Sumer tried to build a tower to reach Heaven. God realized what they were doing and scattered the tower. In doing so, he spread the people of Sumer across the world and divided their languages to keep them from joining forces again. Rife hopes to reverse that effect by reducing the people of the world back to

the Sumerian tongue, from which they would be unable to create new, separate languages, through the use of Snow Crash. Because Sumerian is an agglutinative language, as I explained earlier, "if [one] could hear someone speaking Sumerian, it would sound like a long stream of short syllables strung together" (Stephenson 210), which is why the parishioners at Reverend Wayne's Pearly gates just sound like they're babbling. By reducing the language of the people of the world to Sumerian, Rife would be able to cross all the mental and physical boundaries in *Snow Crash* and place himself in the ultimate position of control.

Rife is reducing language to a code that only he understands, thus giving himself sole control over the people who speak this language. Hiro discovers that Rife "had stacks all over the place, on all different topics. Stacks where he would pull together knowledge from all over the fucking map and tie it all together. He had these things stashed here and there around the Metaverse, waiting for the information to become useful" (337). Rife is using Snow Crash as his tool to infect people and gain control over them. However, this weapon is a piece of information, which can be even more deadly than a sword. As Deleuze explains in his discussion about control, language is the force that maintains disciplinary societies:

In the societies of control . . . what is important is no longer either a signature or a number, but a code: the code is a *password*, while on the other hand the disciplinary societies are regulated by *watchwords* (as much from the point of view of integration as from that of resistance). The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. (5)

Information, Deleuze is saying, is the most important tool when trying to gain or maintain control over a people. We can see this in nearly any historical time in which a richer, more knowledgeable race of people took control over another, more ignorant race. Stephenson is just modernizing this historical repetition and giving it a posthuman twist. However, Stephenson's future, unlike many other works of science fiction, has arguably come true, which is potentially disturbing because although *Snow Crash* is not exactly a dystopia, it is not a utopia, either. Instead of physically enslaving his followers with manacles around their wrists, Rife is enslaving their minds. By taking control of their minds, he is controlling his follower's thoughts and their means of expression. In short, he is controlling their language.

As presented in the context of *Snow Crash*, Babylonian mythology contends that in a similar situation, the god Enki ultimately destroyed the Sumerian language through the use of a *nam-shub*, "a speech with magical force. The closest English equivalent would be 'incantation,' but this has a number of incorrect connotations" (211). In the Sumerian culture, "[t]he *en* was the custodian of the local temple, where the *me*—the rules of the society—were stored on clay tablets" (Stephenson 255). Enki was the *en* in his time and the *nam-shub* he created erased all of the *me* in his people's minds. The effect of "the *nam-shub* of Enki was the beginnings of human consciousness—when we first had to think for ourselves" (398). Many of these tables have been excavated and claimed by Rife, "but he refuses to release them" (251) because he is using the information to create his own *nam-shub*—*Snow Crash*. By exploiting an ancient language that only Rife knows how to control, he seeks to rewire his followers' language skills so that only he can understand and control them. When a person's language is removed, he

loses his ability to communicate his thoughts about the world. These skills are the most valuable assets for succeeding in society. By taking away his followers' language, Rife will make them completely dependent upon him and he will have complete control.

Hayles also notices the attention that Stephenson gives to the theory (read: language) behind the computer systems about which he writes. Because Stephenson has such an extensive background in physics, geography, and computer science, he is able to give more weight to the theory behind his writing. Hayles gives an extensive explanation of Stephenson's understanding of computer technology in "The Posthuman Body: Inscription and Incorporation in *Galatea 2.2* and *Snow Crash*":

Stephenson takes his inspiration . . . from computational theory. In natural languages, performative utterances operate in a symbolic realm, where they can make things happen because they refer to actions that are themselves symbolic constructions . . . Although material changes do take place when computers process code (magnetic polarities are changed on a disk), it is the act of attaching significance to these physical changes that constitutes computation as such. (14)

Within a computer language, like a verbal or written language, utterances and symbols have their own meanings within the context of a language. Similarly, the babble of Rife's followers may appear to be nonsense to someone who does not understand the language, but to someone like Rife, it makes perfect sense. One way of understanding this is the way in which one may not understand a line of computer code. That doesn't mean the computer code has no meaning; it simply means that the person reading the language has no understanding of how it works.

The exploitation of the Sumer myth appears to be the lynch pin holding together L. Bob Rife's plot; by converting people to his religion and reducing them to his babbling language, Rife is exerting complete control over his followers. What is interesting about this plan is that it appears to exploit the panoptic system that Foucault discusses. The world of *Snow Crash* is already a panopticon in that the society is already divided by franchises. Once Rife infects every person with Snow Crash, they will all speak the same babbling language and in turn be under Rife's control, instead of under the control of their society. Rife is taking control of the panopticon and placing himself at the center; he can see and understand every person around him, but they cannot understand one another. This panopticon is not made of steel, but it functions in the same way.

## V. Conclusion

*It is the purpose of Cybernetics to develop a language and techniques that will enable us indeed to attack the problem of control and communication in general, but also to find the proper repertory of ideas and techniques to classify their particular manifestations under certain concepts.*

—Norbert Wiener  
*The Human Use of Human Beings*

The levels of control that exist in *Snow Crash* are both numerous and layered. Some of the control, like the work of the MetaCops and the CIC are obvious, but other elements of control, like L. Bob Rife's Metaverse boiler room, are less obvious. In the posthuman world of *Snow Crash*, one is part and parcel of his society of control and all that it contains. He may try to escape to the Metaverse or to the perceived safety of religion, but as the saying goes, "wherever you go, there you are." One can no more escape his society or the world in which he lives any more than he can escape his own skin. He can escape mentally for a period of time, but eventually he must come back to reality, no matter how unappealing it may be to him.

Hiro Protagonist appears to be the only character in the novel that is able to completely escape the social control of his posthuman world, however, what Hiro fails to realize most of the time is that he is still controlled by his physical reality, despite the freedom of the Metaverse. He cannot stay completely immersed in the Metaverse if he's driving his car, for example, because he would crash if he couldn't see some measure of reality underneath the visual projection of the Metaverse. It appears as though he has all

the freedom he could want in the Metaverse, but the laws of the physical Reality still regulate those of the virtual world. It is only through creative reconnaissance that Hiro is able to penetrate L. Bob Rife's boiler room in the Metaverse, and Hiro proves to be the ultimate foil of Rife's control. He is under the belief that his headquarters remains safely protected from intrusion, but a bit of careful coding on Hiro's part gets him inside the cube. This proves that Rife's control is also just a perception, which is Baudrillard's argument about power and control. Rife's control and power is an illusion through which Hiro sees, which allows him to defeat the creator of the Snow Crash virus.

Every piece of code in the Metaverse can be hacked into in the same way that the nam-shub of Enki could scatter the languages of Sumer and subsequently be reversed, it just requires the right knowledge. Knowledge is power; with enough knowledge and money to achieve one's goals (such as L. Bob Rife's goal of world domination) one is capable of achieving great power. Even Juanita, the only one of Rife's antenna people who becomes a slave willingly, has to give up a degree of her autonomy in order to gain a measure of control over Rife. She has become a "Ba'al Shem, meaning 'master of the divine name'" (Stephenson 278) and has gained the ability to "hack the brainstem" (430). This gives her the ability to prevent Rife from controlling her through her antenna, but it also allows her to control other antenna people. Juanita is the only person in the novel who is able to overcome the limitations of her body and create more *me*. However, she still must conform to the limitations of her world, both in and out of the Metaverse. They may have defeated L. Bob Rife, but as long as the knowledge of what he did is still available, someone else can still harness that information and use it for the same or even more detrimental means.

Together, N. Katherine Hayles, Michel Foucault, Giles Deleuze, and Jean Baudrillard form the basis of my argument that there are many levels of control exerted upon the characters in the posthuman world of *Snow Crash*. From Hayles I have gathered the information to describe what, exactly, defines us as posthuman. As she argues, this is an event that has already occurred—it is not a matter of becoming posthuman, but rather just defining what we already are. However, *Snow Crash* takes the idea of posthumanism to an even deeper, almost frightening level. We lose our humanity at the expense of giving ourselves over to technology. We allow machines and computers, and ultimately, other people, to control our thoughts and actions. The people who goggle into the Metaverse aren't simply giving control of themselves up to the virtual system; they are also giving control of themselves to the individuals (the hackers and L. Bob Rife) who operate and own the Metaverse. There is no such thing as true freedom in the posthuman world, nor in any other world, no matter how much it appears to be so.

The characters in *Snow Crash*, similarly, are already posthumans living in a posthuman world. Using Foucault and Deleuze I have described how a disciplinary society functions and why this is important. Modern societies cannot operate without some sort of carceral system in place. They must be able to punish criminals and keep order amongst their citizens or they are doomed to failure. The carceral system in *Snow Crash*, like most other institutions in the novel, is only a representation of the service it should actually perform. The irony of the carceral system in *Snow Crash* is that some of the franchises work as better peacekeeping entities than the police. Finally, Baudrillard allowed me to show the shortcomings of a world of representations. However, with *Snow Crash* I was able to take Baudrillard's argument one step further because Stephenson's

characters actually goggle in to a world of representations—the Metaverse. This is a larger metaphor for what Baudrillard means when he says that we live in a world of simulacra. The *Snow Crash* characters and the people of the modern world who believe they can "escape" to the Metaverse (Internet) are not escaping anything, for it is impossible to escape the world which one inhabits.

I would like to reiterate that in my argument I hope to show the connection *Snow Crash* has to the modern world. Stephenson's novel illustrates the same benefits and shortcomings that users face in society today through their physical world, the Internet, and religion. Stephenson is not creating a completely fictional world so much as drawing from the world in which we already live. The United States of America with which we are familiar is one country, although it is owned by many private organizations. Not only is it already divided into 50 different states, but within each of those states, there are various levels of ownership and control. Large privately-owned plots of land, such as Walt Disney World and Princeton University, are larger than many small United States towns. Naturally, we do not perceive these organizations the same way we perceive the franchise caricatures in *Snow Crash*, but at their most basic level, there is little difference between privately-owned fenced-in Walt Disney World and Mr. Lee's Greater Hong Kong. Similarly, the Internet is comparable to the Metaverse and Reverend Wayne's Pearly Gates to the various religious organizations that style themselves as pious, but are only seeking monetary gain. The world of *Snow Crash* is not an alternate universe, but rather a caricature of the world in which we currently live.

## NOTES

1. According to the myth, all the citizens of the ancient city, Sumer spoke the same language, and together they tried to build a tower to reach Heaven. God realized what they were doing and scattered the tower. In doing so, he spread the people of Sumer across the world and divided their languages to keep them from joining forces again.

2. According to the FBI, "Many who fled here in the early 1920s helped establish what is known today as La CosaNostra or the American Mafia." "Cosa Nostra" translates literally in English to "our thing." In *Snow Crash*, pizza is satirically "our thing."

3. CosaNostra Pizza Incorporated, is owned by "Uncle Enzo . . . The Sicilian Colonel Sanders . . . The Capo and prime figurehead" (Stephenson 4). The Deliverators are highly-regarded graduates of CosaNostra Pizza University, which is ironic because fast food workers tend to be minimum wage earners in our society. As with many elements of *Snow Crash*, Stephenson has reversed the assumptions a reader might have about a given element of society.

4. "Burbclave" is a combination of the words "suburb" and "enclave."

5. Kouriers work for the franchise RadiKS, Radikal Kourier Systems. Kouriers are messengers who surf the highways on skateboards by harpooning vehicles. They operate "[I]ike a bicycle messenger, but a hundred times more irritating because they don't pedal under their own power—they just latch on to slow you down" (Stephenson 13-14). Y.T., Hiro's sidekick, works a Kourier.

6. A Hoosegow is a Spanish prison.

7. "The Disneyland imaginary is neither true nor false; it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate in reverse the fiction of the real. Whence the debility the infantile degeneration of this imaginary. It is meant to be an infantile world, in order to make us believe that the adults are elsewhere, in the "real" world, and to conceal the fact that real childishness is everywhere, particularly among those adults who go there to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness" (Baudrillard #).

8. This is perhaps a reference to Edwin Abbot's novel, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, in which a square tells the story of his two-dimensional world, Flatland, and his visits to Lineland, a one-dimensional world, and Spaceland, where he meets a cube. In Stephenson's novel, however, this is no doubt a reference to the fact that the Fed operates on two-dimensional computers.

9. According to Margo Maine, Ph.D., "Exceptionally tall, but with a child's size three foot permanently molded in a high-heeled position, Barbie's measurements read 39-18-33. Barbie calls this a "full figure," adding that "at 5'9," my happiest weight is 110 pounds." A minimum expected weight for that height is 145 pounds; 110 pounds poses medical risk. Contoured with no body fat or belly, a human Barbie could not menstruate. Her indented ribcage could only be achieved through plastic surgery and the removal of ribs. In fact, Barbie has lost weight since she was created in 1959" (210).

10. The CIC also has a "piece of software called simply, Earth. It is the user interface that CIC uses to keep track of every bit of spatial information that it owns—all the maps, weather data, architectural plans, and satellite surveillance stuff" (Stephenson 106). One can access this information, but he must pay for a subscription.

11. The importance of Elvis is unclear, save for the title of "Reverend Wayne's famous best seller[,] How America Was Saved from Communism: ELVIS SHOT JFK" (Stephenson 194). Like many attributes of Pearly Gates, the Elvis-worship seems to be yet another scheme cooked up by Reverend Wayne and L. Bob Rife.

12. As the Librarian explains to Hiro in the Metaverse, "No languages whatsoever are descended from Sumerian. It is an agglutinative tongue, meaning that it is a collection of morphemes or syllables that are grouped into words—very unusual" (Stephenson 210). As the name would suggest, the sounds in this language are veritably "glued" together. According to the reference in the Oxford English Dictionary for the entry "agglutinative," "The chief distinction between an inflectional and an agglutinative language consists in the fact that agglutinative languages preserve the consciousness of their roots, and therefore do not allow them to be affected by phonetic corruption." Thus, one would be *unable* to derive new languages from such a language. This is perhaps why God was able to scatter the Sumerian language into multiple new languages, according to the myth.

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