

Capital violence and ethical absence in "Snow Crash"

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Abstract: "Snow Crash" is a work with a deeply realistic dimension, showing Neal Stephenson's profound thinking on the problems of modern society. Set in the future United States, the work depicts a picture of a late capitalist society with money as its supreme value and severely divided social classes. Under the leadership of capital logic, the concept of social ethics gradually weakens, and the resulting capital violence not only distorts the spiritual world of individuals, but also leads to the complete rupture of the relationship between man and nature. People try to return to nature and regain the ethical dimension with the help of the light and shadow illusion in the yuan-universe. However, they are still difficult to break through the barriers of capital logic and extricate themselves from the reality of alienation.

Keywords: Metaverse; "Snow Crash"; late capitalism; environmental ethics

1. Introduction

The second half of the 20th century was an era of rapid expansion of information and knowledge, including the multi-field technological revolution represented by electronic computer, space technology and biological engineering technology, which started a new process of the development of human society. Emerging from this unique historical context, science fiction literature frequently emphasizes technological innovation, reflects on the new cultural paradigms of the information age, and explores humanity's free will in its dominion over nature. American science fiction writer Neal Stephenson's "Snow Crash" is here. The application and writing of new technology is one of the most striking plots of the novel, taking place in not only the miraculous industrial paradise of Los Angeles but also the virtual network city "Metaverse." The metaverse symbolizes the highest peak of the technological development of The Times, is a new experiment of human imagination of the living environment, and is the "true dream and the technology to realize the dream."^[1]

The novel revolves around the adventure of Hong and Y.T. Their route across the real world and the metaverse outlines the authors' thoughts on politics, ethnicity, gender, ethics and other issues. At present, the academic discussion on "Snow Crash" focuses on the exploration of the theme connotation of the novel. In particular, the metacosmic concept in the book "provides a good online environment for scholars to understand the contemporary society and culture."^[2] Swanstrom Lisa pointed out that "Snow Crash" discusses the flow of subjectivity through the network structure of the metaverse;^[3] domestic scholars also believe that the metaverse is a complete alternative to reality, which actually shows the authors' critical view of the information society.^[4] "Snow Crash" became a science fiction classic, in addition to the profound reality and historical dimensions, but it also stems from Neal Stephenson's exquisite narrative strategy and light artistic brushwork. The novel adopts the cloak of futurism and contains a profound reference to the contemporary society. It skillfully integrates the lack of late capitalist social ethics into the natural crisis caused by the excessive expansion of instrumental rationality, thus revealing the survival crisis faced by human beings under the violent oppression of capital.

2. Capital violence and the dual urban landscape

The deterioration of the ecological environment is one of the most common writing content in science fiction works. Some scholars believe that science fiction always involves ecological issues.^[5] When scientific reason becomes the dominant law of social development, the relationship between human beings and nature will change. "Snow Crash" The environmental crisis presented in the final analysis is the violence of capital operation in the era of late capitalism. The story is set in Los Angeles, where government power fades, and the capital chaebol falls. In order to pursue unlimited

value appreciation, the capital undertakes the functions of the government, integrates a self-contained "franchise organization," and governs and controls the public by means of logical rule. From the perspective of endogenous structure, the franchise organization takes factors such as assets or class as the core ideological core to ensure the cohesion of internal members. "White Column" has strict barriers to entry; only white people with a certain level of economy can acquire citizenship, and "drunken Columbia" is a paradise for crime, populated with all the drug dealers in Los Angeles. Franchising organizations play games with each other, excluding all non-Chinese ethnic groups, and often fighting for natural resources such as land through violent means. They often for the construction of a road and compete with each other; King Park Shopping Center before the two roads repeatedly, one of the first California state roads, was acquired after the name "Tong Road Company CSV 5 Road", the other is a federal highway after renamed "Roaming Avenue Corporation, California Road 12", a big developer, common into a driving shopping mall of the same parking system, now buys the two roads. It is through this plot that the author skillfully shows the predatory of capital and the process of gradual marginalization of government.

The closure and division of the franchise organization inevitably lead to the differentiation of the rich and poor classes in society, which is manifested in the dualization of the urban landscape in the novel. Mitchell mentioned in the theory of binary city that there is a tension between the organization that can create value and the group that cannot create value, and they form a binary city system polarized in space and society.^[6] On the contrary, in the human living conditions in the novel, the people at the bottom are isolated in the poor streets, and they are excluded from the rich land by capital in a pre-designed way and become the object of being ruled by capital violence.^[7] The strong group represented by capitalists are ecological destroyers and vested interests. In the novel, industrial buildings are often built in areas where people experiencing poverty live: slums are the most representative polluted places, and the bottom groups represented by people experiencing poverty are suffering from severe ecological crises. Their living environment has been alienated into a place of toxic substances, and diseases threaten their bodies. The "sacrifice area" is "the land where the cost of cleaning up exceeds the entire future economic value."^[8] The Long Beach sacrifice area is a settlement of Cambodian villages built around a huge abandoned factory. Heavy metal emissions, chemicals or other carcinogens from the factory make the sacrifice area a wasteland, overgrown with dry weeds. The poor living environment also causes the spread of malignant diseases. Lepers and street vagrants lay by the gutter, their sick bodies grilled on kerosene barrels. Although Neal Stephenson does not directly describe the disease in the slums, he has repeatedly emphasized the presence of polychlorinated dibenzene compounds, asbestos waste fiber and heavy metal paint in the slums, suggesting that toxic industrial compounds are the direct cause of the illness of slum residents. Polychlorinated diphenyl compound is a highly carcinogenic industrial compound that is mostly used as an insecticide or carpet fire coating and can enter the human body directly through the skin or breathing. It can not only lead to central nervous disorders but also have an impact on the reproductive system, leading to incomplete infant development, deformity or direct death. Industry, as represented by toxic substances byproducts, has completely invaded the slums, creating a terrible poison crisis. The harm caused by toxic substances to humans is protracted. Once the human body absorbs these toxic industrial byproducts, it will take decades to expel them. These toxic industrial compounds will not only harm the various human organs but also directly act on the reproductive function of humans, causing infant deformity or stillbirth, affecting the growth and development of the next generation. The slums have been completely reduced to the aggregation of toxic substances.

Compared with the ordinary poor, people who master wealth and technology are comfortable with environmental problems. They are able to reduce the risk of abuse. In the face of toxic smog, the poor always carry a heavy and heavy gas mask, but the rich can use technology to resolve the toxins in the smog. The gas mask always appears in the life of the protagonist, whether in the city center or the suburbs, a hong always wears a gas mask; he even repeatedly reminds people around to wear gas masks. When Y.T. first boarded Wus' car, the first thing to notice was the gas mask hanging behind the seat. The presence of gas masks means that humans can no longer be directly exposed to the air and must seek help from external instruments. But in the upscale neighborhood where Dawei lives, the air is mixed with amino acids, clean and cool. Hong and Da Wei can sit directly on the outdoor tower and sip a beer.^[9] Not only that, the dogs of the rich can enjoy preferential treatment, no matter how bad the external environment, the Wus security industry police dogs always stay in a cool and comfortable space in the universe.

The different environmental landscapes of the same city brought by toxic substances mean that under the action of the logic of capital, the people at the bottom have completely become the tools of capital to grab profits. The novel begins with the "Our Business" pizza company business: an efficient

and short-term pizza delivery process, and a high compensation mechanism. The Courier can deliver the pizza in any legal or even illegal way, as long as he can deliver it to the customer within half an hour. Once time, customers can shoot the Courier, enjoy free pizza and get an apology from the pizza shop owner Uncle Enzo. But for Ahong, the only reason for him to avoid overtime is not to allow Uncle Enzo to waste his personal time apologizing to the guests. This incident shows that the people at the bottom have become naked life, and they suffer from the groundless violent threat of capital, and are the object of exploitation and destruction. Naked life is an important concept in amben's political philosophy, referring to those lives of social disconnection and prolonged abuse. Agamben used the word "homo sacer" to describe the naked life, where anyone can abuse the victim without being held accountable, and that "for the victim, everyone is the sovereign." [9] The dignity and value of the victims are still trampled on, let alone the place where they live.

Through the cross description of the living environment of different groups, Neal Stephenson showed a late capitalist society under the shadow of poisons: the poor are forced to become the victims of capital seeking profit and must face the alienation of the living environment brought by toxic substances, but the rich enjoy the dividends brought by technology and live in a comfortable environment. Lawrence Buuer pointed out that "poison discourse is the cultural field threshold where various social forces converge." The poisons written in the novel are not only the chronic disease of capitalism but also the various ethical problems in the current social production mode.

3. Capital logic and ethical distortion

Behind the extreme social class tearing is hidden the ethical distortion in the late capitalist society. "Snow Crash", the basic political framework of combining capital and technology, is invented, and the overall social context born from this shows the characteristics of weak ethical concepts and the supremacy of money. On the one hand, the franchise organization and the multinational corporations, although controlling most of the wealth of society, still pursue profit wildly, showing the paranoid and cold nature of capital; on the other hand, under the crazy profit-seeking behavior of capital, the bottom people gradually become the subject of capital logic. They recognize the means of capital expansion and even become the hand of capital violence.

Since the second industrial revolution, people have viewed science and technology as the engines propelling capitalism's development and as closely linked to the growth of productive forces. "Snow Crash" There has always been a connection between technological innovation and capital operations. "Our Business," the world's largest pizza company, boasts the most advanced pizza baking and distribution technology, and the entire pizza production and distribution line exemplifies modern technology. From the initial order call, the corrugated pizza box, with its proprietary chips and components, assists the courier in quickly identifying the delivery address and calculating the optimal route. In order to complete the pizza delivery at the fastest speed, Uncle Enzo even opened the "Our Business" University of Pizza and set up the Pizza Management Science Laboratory to analyze the courier and the ordering customers from the aspects of expression, language, logic, and so on, so as to obtain all the professional problems they will encounter during the delivery of pizza. This is precisely why the "Our Cause" Pisa company has no competitors—No one can beat "our business" pizza company, which has a faster delivery rate. The same is true in other industries, where the Black Day boss, Koji, is himself the top hacker; the world's top wealthy businessman, Mr. Li, uses "high tech" as his "franchise" slogan.

Profit is the nature of capital. With the help of science and technology, the profit pursuit of capital becomes more and more intense, even deviating from the ethical principles of society and extending the predatory capital logic to all levels of society. Capital plunders human living spaces and forces them to endure technical violence. Franchise organizations and multinational companies, with their advanced technologies, engage in ceaseless industrial activities to acquire natural resources. The chemicals from the Long Beach dock became a toxic desert; the speeding cars on the viaduct caused air pollution and became more toxic; the polluted water was gray-brown. The airport in Hong Kong is a "with you save" warehouse; take-off and landing passenger plane tails can directly block the sunset. Many homeless people in shantytowns sleep in overturned trash bins or refrigerator boxes. There is no green here, only a flat space of reinforced concrete and a few drought-tolerant plants. Not only that, but the capital has also ruthlessly trampled on the human body and spirit. In order to pursue excess profits, some companies deliberately make drugs and induce others to take them, resulting in the widespread spread of drugs. The title "Snow Crash" is from the book *Drug Avalanche*, a steroid-like virus that can penetrate cell walls and damage the brain nerves. Those who have smoked the avalanche can see a

"sinister cloud of numbers shaking. Its color is bright, rapidly changing, but indescribable, and looks particularly dazzling." Get confused and beyond the pleasure. In order to complete the monopoly of the world's optical fiber industry, Lev deliberately led the "avalanche" of wanton circulation. He regarded the ark as a place of experimentation, providing the "avalanche" for the inhabitants of the ark, which enabled them to indulge in fantasy, pleasure, and dissipation under the influence of drugs. People who have taken "avalanches" contain many toxins in their blood, and Lev sends their blood into a new "avalanche" to other corners of the world.

Capital violence is not always manifested in an obvious way. In more cases, capital takes the form of Slow Violence to make the vulnerable groups represented by the poor gradually identify with the operation mode of capital logic and include it. Rob Nixon noted in the *Slow Violence: Environmentalism of the Poor* show violence refers to "acts of wear violence that is not usually regarded as violent, and is delayed. The current ecological violence is a kind of slow violence."^[10] The damage it causes is slow and gradual, and the results of the damage are often transplanted from one place to another.^[11] Rob Nickerson believes that slow violence is a double transfer of violence, with the cross-spatial transformation of violent process and the extension of violent results. Due to the abuse of chemical products, the current human living environment has been completely eroded by toxic substances, so that the major companies often use nothing to compete for the precious land resources. Land competition in the real world even extends into the virtual space. The metaverse is a kind of network simulation space that is infinitely close to the real world. It can allow individuals to immerse themselves in the virtual motion sensing technology and experience the second life under the "environmental freedom" in the form of "virtual body". The towering buildings and the neon screens hanging in the sky are one of the representative symbols of the metacuniverse, interwoven to outline a highly developed future urban landscape. About millions of people walk through the universe every day, where they can chat, race fast and even fight. The street is at the heart of the universe, which needs to be developed and built, as companies seek permission to get the global Multimedia Accord, buy shops and land on the street, get planning permits and licenses, and even bribe prosecutors. But in fact, the whole universe is a huge computer screen, faded neon lights of the universe only black: "the universe of the sky and the earth is dark, like a picture without any image shows the computer screen," street is made of optical fiber network structures of computer graphics, but it is still because of profitable by capital division and rob.

The terrible part of capital slow violence is more than this. In the novel, the discrimination and depreciation of the vulnerable groups can be seen everywhere. However, under the shaping of capital slow violence, they not only accept their marginalized position, but also surrender to the current ethical social order. Every day, hundreds of millions of people will enter the yuan universe street, but in Ahongs eyes, these people will be automatically classified as "rich" and "poor". Owning a computer is a prerequisite for entering the metaverse, and the configuration of the computer determines the appearance of the incarnation, high configuration of the computer will make the incarnation fine and real, but low configuration of the computer will make the incarnation fuzzy and even tremble, "experts can distinguish cheap goods and expensive manual cutting products." This plot shows that the operation logic of capital crazy profit has been widely recognized, and money is the only criterion to determine the role, role and significance of everything within people. One of the most contradictory characters in the novel, Crow, his father, a victim of World War II, has experienced colonial slavery and two nuclear bombs. Crow himself had not been accepted by white society because of his minority status and experienced a tragic childhood. Influenced by his father and his childhood experience, the crow hates the western and western way of life, hates the United States, and his biggest life dream is to drop an atomic bomb in the United States. But to get a good income, Crow comes to Los Angeles to work for Lev, selling the avalanche virus and killing all threats. He hopes to live a stable and safe life, but also actively become a cold-blooded killer. Crow is an oppressed minority and also a marginal group that has been subjected to social non-ethical treatment for a long time. However, in the society with rampant capital logic, he not only gladly accepts his identity, but even becomes the executioner who encourages the violence of capital.

Under the continuous action of capital logic, social ethics is distorted, and the whole society is immersed in the crazy pursuit of interests. In order to gain more benefits, some people even hurt the lives of others through violence. When the poor and other vulnerable groups are regarded as the tools of interest under the logic of capital, it is difficult for the society to reshape the dimension of ethics.

4. Capital refutation and ethical regression experiment

Rolston believes that human ethical culture should be natural. Nature is "the source of life and life value",^[12] but also the root of all things. Currently, the significant decline in the natural environment closely aligns with the ever-expanding notion of egoism among humans, where they view nature as a tool for their own benefit and consistently strive to maximize their own interests through interactions with nature. As a result, Rolston believes that returning to nature is the best way to restore human ethical culture, which represents the human ability to accept others. In response to the ongoing alienation of the ecological environment, human beings have created a new "metauniverse" in cyberspace, attempting to propose a fresh perspective on the current environmental issues. In the novel, the metaverse serves as a haven of freedom and an imaginative experiment within the framework of the human environment, offering an additional avenue for the resurgence of the natural landscape. The Vietnamese Wu bought a large piece of superyuan land and built it into a Mekong Delta connected by dozens of villages. Y.T. named the land "Xanadu." There are thousands of miles of rice fields and working farmers, but in the real world, degraded land makes agricultural activity nearly disappear. The Vietnam War wounded Wu, leaving him paraplegic. He had sound limbs and ideal accommodation through the metauniverse, and he felt the psychological satisfaction of returning to the perfect state of life before the Vietnam War. When the real world cannot meet the green needs of individuals, technology can directly blur the boundary between reality and the virtual, bringing unique sensory intake and emotional experience to individuals so that they can obtain transcendental experience in the virtual digital space. In reality, Hong is a poor pizza delivery man who can only afford to rent a narrow warehouse. However, in the universe, he owns a villa with a Japanese garden, where he can observe kites in flight by opening the screen on his desktop. In the universe, the green landscape is just digital information written through software, but it can still provide a pure land away from the hustle and bustle. In fact, it creates a new way to realize the freedom of the human environment and facilitates the integration of technology and ecology.

However, despite the capital's extreme optimism in announcing to the public that the universe's cutting-edge technology, which represents the current environmental problems, will also reach the reader—man and nature find it challenging to revert to their original harmonious state. In fact, the absence of a green photoelectric image signifies the current ethics, where nature has become completely alienated due to its lack of vitality and manipulation, leading to a loss of value and status. People struggle to transcend their life experiences from nature. However, modern science and technology, represented by the universe, are regarded as the masters of human power, enabling humans to escape from the alienating reality of "surreality," where the body's perception of the real world is shaped by the algorithmic logic of digital space tanding and writing about the wilderness is an important theme in American literature. Writers often seek their self-positioning and spiritual belonging in the wilderness and regard the wilderness as a place for the recuperation of the soul. However, in "Snow Crash", the wilderness suffers the most from poisoning. Humans fear the wilderness and lose conscious connection with it. Water systems often serve as carriers of toxic substances. The ocean is brown, cloudy, and has a foul smell; the fish living in the sea are more varied, not edible. The contaminated land is evident everywhere: the long beach is filthy, the ground is littered with glass and asbestos, and the grass has transformed into a wasteland, home only to easy-to-survive sage, cactus, and tumbleweed. It is difficult for human beings to be intoxicated with nature as before, but they want to escape from this dirty place, but the metaverse can provide psychological compensatory satisfaction. Hong, who spends most of his leisure time in the universe, once declared, "Even if you live in a cesspit, always have Yuan universe to." "Your apartment serves as the airport, where the loud noise of a plane's landing can be heard." Hong's response is to wear goggles and headphones, which serve the purpose of eliminating noise from the universe. Environmental aesthetician Carlsson guided environmental aesthetics with the Scientific Cognitivist Theorem, and he believed that human beings should objectively appreciate the characteristics of nature itself. The function goes against the traditional formalism of guiding natural appreciation by experience,^[13] as it posits that "once ecological facts enter into aesthetic appreciation, they will transform into aesthetic value, rather than transforming ecological facts into aesthetic appreciation."^[14] According to Carlson's perspective, letting go of the traditional appreciation of formalism can actually assist the subject in directly understanding the meaning dimension of the ecological landscape, thereby deepening the interaction between the subject and the ecological environment. On the other hand, the subject often bases their appreciation of the ecological environment on their personal experiences, which can result in a lack of sensitivity towards the ecological landscape. This insensitivity will eventually lead to the subject's negative behavior toward landscape protection, which manifests as a disregard for the real environmental problems in "Snow Crash". When A Hong puts on headphones to block out the plane's noise, he's actually evading reality

by refusing to see, engage in dialogue, and submit to the violence capital imposes. This acquiescence is a longitudinal approach to capital's non-ethical behavior.

Upon entering the metaverse, human beings continue to comprehend their true nature through subjective values. Metaverse is a virtual world following the boom of electronic media and digital media, and its mode of action depends on the coding rules of the technology itself. The existence of flowers and trees in the metaverse relies on the support of technology. If the computer configuration or programmers lack skill, these landscapes can only exist in a fuzzy or blurred form. As far as these scenes are concerned, the aesthetic value they bring depends on the subject's past experience and emotional experiences. Before the Vietnam War, when Y.T. went to Wu's metaverse mansion, he first saw a French colonial villa in a small village on the Mekong River. When she walked into Wu's office, she saw the endless rice fields and Vietnamese through the balcony door. Wu's Villa presents the overall Vietnamese view of 1955, so he even ages himself with Japanese geisha images, even if he does not feel anything. Rolston does not believe that human subjective feelings endow the value of natural existence. He points out that nature is what can create value. Nature has the instrumental value to meet human needs, but it also has the intrinsic value that can be found without any assistance. He holds the belief that both the instrumental and intrinsic values of nature are essential, serving as fundamental values that range from anthropocentrism to environmental harmony in human existence. Looking back at the environmental narrative in "Snow Crash", the operating rules of capital logic go beyond boundaries and deeply penetrate all levels of society. Both real nature and virtual nature cannot be separated from the intervention of human subjective value, and instrumental value is the only standard for human beings to evaluate nature. When Wu wants to enter the Yuan universe to experience the green beauty again, he is just experiencing his experience. If he can live in Ahong's Japanese mansion, perhaps he would rather face the bleak landscape in the real world.

5. Conclusion

Generally speaking, science fiction works always engage the future imagination with science and technology, thinking about the optimization of human survival mode and the amplification of existence value under technological iteration. However, in the late capitalist society in which the government power declined and the capital chaebol was divided, science and technology encouraged the non-ethical behavior of capital and became the driving force for the smooth operation of capital logic. It is difficult for human beings to reject the social reality of alienation, and they can only seek the reproduction of green landscapes and the return of ethics as a way of escaping from reality. In the universe, however, people are still unable to avoid technology rule and capital flood combining social flood. The existence of the universe logic based on the individual interaction and dialogue means that its performance in the virtual environment cannot leave the real environment itself; the universe itself means the current reality logic deformity. "Snow Crash" It is the open theme of science fiction that reveals the extreme expansion of instrumental rationality and the loss of ethics in the operation of western capital power, as well as the deep concern about the future of human beings and environmental issues within the logical framework of capital.

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