

Politics, Power, Surveillance in William Gibson's Neuromancer Trilogy

The Cyberpunk Project

Power, in Case's world, meant corporate power. The zaibatsus, the multinationals that shaped the course of human history, had transcended old barriers. Viewed as organisms, they had attained a kind of immortality. You couldn't kill a zaibatsu by assassinating a dozen key executives; there were others waiting to step up the ladder, assume the vacated position, access the vast banks of corporate memory. But Tessier-Ashpool wasn't like that, and he sensed the difference in the death of its founder. Tessier-Ashpool was an atavism, a clan. He remembered the litter of the old man's chamber, the soiled humanity of it, the ragged spines of the old audio disks in their paper sleeves. One foot bare, the other in a velvet slipper.

Case had always taken it for granted that the real bosses, the kingpins in a given industry, would be both more and less than people. He'd seen it in the men who'd crippled him in Memphis, he'd seen Wage affect the semblance of it in Night City, and it had allowed him to accept Armitage's flatness and lack of feeling. He'd always imagined it as a gradual and willing accommodation of the machine, the system, the parent organism. It was the root of street cool, too, the knowing posture that implied connection, invisible lines up to hidden levels of influence. [*Neuromancer*, 203]

As she walked from the Louvre, she seemed to sense some articulated structure shifting to accommodate her course through the city. The waiter would be merely a part of the thing, one limb, a delicate probe or palp. The whole would be larger, much larger. How could she have imagined that it would be possible to live, to move, in the unnatural field of Virek's wealth without suffering distortion ? Virek had taken her up, in all her misery, and had rotated her through the monstrous, invisible stresses of his money, and she had been changed. Of course, she thought, of course : it moves around me constantly, watchful and invisible, the vast and subtle mechanism of Herr Virek's surveillance. [*Count Zero*, 73]

"He talks about corporations as though they were animals of some kind". [*Count Zero*, 139; note "evolutionary pressures" a line above]