

New Future, Same Questions

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In Gibson's fictional future, we are presented with such new oddities as stimstim and the Sprawl, but nevertheless it doesn't take much time to accustom to the new landscape. "The future's just the past wearing a different face", as the song goes, and the face turned to us in the *Neuromancer* series is a recognizable one. Stories fit into certain patterns, and it requires no great leap in our understanding to imagine "a stranger comes into the matrix" (Wintermute or the Loas) instead of the traditional "a stranger comes to town". The human animal has always been concerned with certain questions, and in the *Neuromancer* trilogy, these questions are posed with a new spin.

For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultations of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh.

When [Case falls from cyberspace](#), the reader is faced with new shadings to an old question. The division between the body and the mind (you can substitute spirit or soul depending on your proclivities) has been an age-old one in philosophy, religious doctrine and literature. Here, however, it becomes a division between the body and the matrix.

Throughout the *Neuromancer* trilogy, there is a definite alignment between the matrix and the afterlife, as becomes clear through an examination of the matrix's inhabitants. In *Neuromancer*, Case reenters the matrix with the construct of his old mentor, Dixie. Though Dixie is physically dead, his construct (a sort of recorded personality) lives on in the matrix, almost immortal. Is this the only afterlife humanity can hope for -- a recorded scan of someone's personality ? And can Dixie's construct be considered human ? By what definitions ? These are questions posed, though not answered, by Gibson's novel.

The matrix is also inhabited by the AIs, artificial intelligences -- created beings, which have no flesh. Indeed, Wintermute (one of the *Neuromancer* AIs) offers almost a direct parallel between the matrix and the divine, asking Case whether he would prefer it if Wintermute appeared to him in the form of a burning bush, much as God did to Moses. Later, in *Count Zero* and, to a lesser extent, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, it appears that some splintered aspects of the AIs have begun to inhabit the matrix in the form of voodoo loas.

If the matrix is the home of constructs -- humans such as Dixie or 3Jane whose personalities survive after their physical deaths -- then is it a sort of afterlife ? If it is inhabited by spirits and gods then is it a type of heaven ? As Sally/Molly says to Cherry when she asks about Angie's death, "There's dying, then there's dying" (*Mona Lisa Overdrive*, 301). But are we to understand that, after Angie and Bobby's physical deaths, they have retained life within the matrix ? Then what happens if the batteries run out, if the system crashes ?

What does it mean to be human ? What happens after death ? Is there a higher power, a God or gods ? These are questions addressed in a multitude of different texts throughout the ages. Gibson is, to an extent, asking these same questions too. New future, same questions, different twists. The idea of how technology may eventually effect these questions, and our reactions to them, is a fascinating one. Gibson doesn't answer any questions, but he gives us new ways of asking them.