

Cyborg Cynicism ?

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In the future, as William Gibson suggests in *Neuromancer*, we may be less limited by the "meat" of which our bodies are made by the use of cyborg biomedical technology. Elective surgery will be possible for those who want a new look or new or enhanced capabilities. If something goes wrong (a bad heart or damaged pancreas) the damaged or defective body-part will be replaced quite easily, with either real organs from donors, or perhaps even synthetic organs.

"[Case](#) turned his head and looked up into Wage's face. It was a tanned and forgettable mask. The eyes were vatgrown sea-green Nikon transplants. Wage wore a suit of gunmetal silk and a simple bracelet of platinum on either wrist. He was flanked by his joeboys, nearly identical young men, their arms and shoulders bulging with grafted muscle."

At first, this type of technology seems very exciting. Who wouldn't want a strong new pair of biceps, or a built-in watch ? Throughout the novel, however, Gibson demonstrates some of the possible downsides of being a cyborg. As we get to know Molly, we learn she had to make tremendous sacrifices to get her hardware :

"This cost a lot", she said, extending her right hand as though it held an invisible fruit. The five blades slid out, then retracted smoothly. "Costs to go to Chiba, costs to get the surgery, costs to have them jack your nervous system up so you'll have the reflexes to go with the gear... You know how I got the money, when I was starting out ? Here. Not here, but a place like it, in the Sprawl. Joke, to start with, cause once they plant the cut-out chip, it seems like free money. Wake up sore, sometimes, but that's it. Renting the goods, is all ?... Trouble was, the cut-out and the circuitry the Chiba clinics put in weren't compatible. So the worktime started bleeding in, and I could remember it".

Perhaps the most complete transformation into a cyborg one can make is to become what Gibson calls a "construct" - your [personality](#) is recorded onto "firmware", and [after your body dies](#) (or before, I suppose) your firmware copy can be activated into existence. Again, this sounds at first to be a pretty good deal. I know lots of people who want to live forever. However Dixie Flatline, Case's construct assistant, gives us a very chilling perspective which indicates that this type of immortal existence leaves quite a bit to be desired :

"How are you doing, Dixie ?"

"I'm dead, Case. Got enough time in on this Hosaka to figure that one."

"How's it feel ?"

"It doesn't."

"Bother you ?"

"What bothers me is, nothin' does."

"How's that ?"

"Had me this buddy in the Russian camp, Siberia, his thumb was frostbit. Medics came by and they cut it off. Month later he's tossin' all night. Elroy, I said, what's eatin' you ? Goddam thumb's itchin', he says. So I told him, scratch it. McCoy, he says, it's the **other** goddam thumb". When the construct laughed, it came through as something else, not laughter, but a stab of cold down Case's spine. "Do me a favor, boy".

"What's that, Dix ?"

"This scam of yours, when it's over, you erase this goddam thing."