The Future Societies of Ira Levin and William Gibson.

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Introduction and Background

The differences between a utopian society and a dystopian one are quite apparent. According to the online dictionary *Merriam-Webster OnLine* the definition of utopia is “a place of ideal perfection especially in laws, government, and social conditions” whereas a dystopia is: “an imaginary place where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives.” These definitions suggest that they are completely different and would logically have almost nothing in common. I intend to do a comparative study of two different novels, one about a utopian society and one about a dystopian. By comparing these novels using the method of close reading, I will attempt to point out the most probable reasons why these societies have developed the way they have. Furthermore, I will, by using narratology, point out a couple of differences as well as similarities in the way these stories are told. I will look at the use of diegetic and mimetic narrative and how time is being used in the stories.

According to Agatha Taormina’s *SciFi Guide* Science Fiction originates from stories of voyages like *Gilgamesh* which dates back to 3000 B.C. and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* from 1726. The term, Science Fiction, states that it is a story with science as a central theme, and during the 19th century these stories began to surface:

Mary Shelley (1797-1851) was just 19 when she wrote *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) as her entry in a competition to tell ghost stories. *Frankenstein* is generally recognized as the first true science fiction novel. The monster is a product of a scientific experiment gone bad. The novel combines social criticism with new scientific ideas. (*SciFi Guide*)

At the end of the 19th century, H G Wells wrote his groundbreaking novels *The Time Machine* (1895) and *War of the Worlds* (1897) and through his visions about the future he took science fiction to a whole new level in terms of plot and theme:

Wells can be said to have invented most categories of science fiction:

- time travel—*The Time Machine* (1895)
- interplanetary travel—*The First Men in the Moon* (1901)
Throughout time, many science fiction novels have been products of a reaction towards society. In Wells’ *War of the Worlds* the almighty British Empire is unable to defend itself against the invading Martians who in turn are defeated by simple bacteria. We can see reflections on communism (the Soviet Union) in Levin’s *This Perfect Day*, and Gibson’s cyberpunk novels can be seen as a reaction towards the growing commercialism during the 80s.

One theme that has been very common throughout science fiction is whether humans choose to use or abuse technology: Will we be humble in our approach or will we decide to play God? In most novels we choose the latter and this godlike new power breaks loose and becomes a threat towards man. In some cases we try to use technology for the common good but put too much trust in what we have created and thereby hand over control to soul-less machines. This over-trust in technology is a common theme in what I choose to call utopian novels.

In many novels and movies dealing with a utopian society there are flaws of some kind which eventually prove that perfection is nothing but an illusion. Some examples are the movies *Logan’s Run* and the more recent *Demolition Man*. Since a Utopia is supposed to be a perfect society, we can say that there are very few real utopian novels. What I refer to as a utopian novel is a story that deals with societies in which people believe that their way of living is perfect or where they strive for perfection. Unlike in a dystopian novel, the problems are hidden from public awareness in order to create a belief in their society’s perfection. In a utopian novel everything seems to be perfect on the surface even though the society is far from a true utopia.

In 1970 the author of *Rosemary’s Baby*, Ira Levin, published a science fiction novel called *This Perfect Day* that told the readers about a seemingly perfect world. In this society there was no aggression, no social injustice, no disease but also no free thought. Everybody is content with what they have and everything seems wonderful. Despite this seemingly perfect
society there are people who believe that their way of life is wrong and plan to overthrow the supreme ruler, the supercomputer UniComp, in order to free everyone from its grasp. The protagonist in the book, Chip, is one of those who dare to defy the standards of their perfect society in order to search for the truth, if there is one. This novel is also interesting because of the fact that it not only deals with a utopian society, it also deals with a dystopian one. However, in this essay I will focus on his utopia.

Little over a decade later the author William Gibson published his groundbreaking novel *Neuromancer* (1984) which quickly became a cult-classic. In this novel Gibson describes a society in decay. Multinational corporations rule the world and ordinary people have no real value. Here violence is a way of life and, for some people, the only way to survive. The reader encounters a world quite the opposite of Levin’s. In *Neuromancer* there are almost no references to happy people, most characters have just adapted and try to make the best of their situation. As in Levin’s novel the protagonist, Case, has to fight technology, in his case it is an artificial intelligence that tries to keep Case from achieving his goal.

These two novels might seem to have very little in common but their stories are in some aspects quite similar. Both novels deal with a society gone wrong where individual life holds little value. The main difference between the two stories is that in the dystopian novel the problems are easily spotted and its inhabitants have adapted to it while in the utopian everything seems to be wonderful and people are blind to the fact that they are being deceived. There are many more differences and I will try to point out the more crucial ones by analyzing the societies depicted in these two books. The first novel analyzed will be *This Perfect Day* (hereafter referred to as PD) followed by *Neuromancer* (referred to as NM).

I will begin by analyzing the semi-totalitarian government in PD and look at how this affects the characters and the environment. Here I will also discuss the issue of gender and how the different sexes are portrayed. I will then analyze Gibson’s society and look at how the lack of political ruling has affected the world in which Case lives. I will also discuss the characters and technology. When discussing characters I will focus on both the female and male protagonists in the novels and look at how they differ from each other. I will also look at how the female protagonists are portrayed, if they are stereotypic feminine women or not, if they can be considered strong or weak and if this can be seen as a reflection of society. Since
technology is a central theme in both novels I will look at which technological advances these two societies have achieved and how they are put to use.

After summing up the differences and similarities I have found between these novels, I will make a conclusion on where the major differences lie within these two structures and point out what makes the two societies what they are. Furthermore I shall, with the use of narratology, analyze the two stories and discuss how the narrative affects the stories. I will discuss how the language of both the narrator and the characters reflect their respective societies and therefore is an essential part of the stories.

**Society**

As in many novels society plays a great role in both of these stories. In PD it seems as if people live in a truly perfect society called the Family. There is no aggression, no selfishness and no disease. Life is peaceful and all members care for each other. There are, however, no hopes or dreams, no artistic creativity and no free thought. Even though everything looks wonderful on the surface they live in a sort of totalitarian state where all decisions are made by its ruler: the super-computer UniComp. The members believe that this is a logical and good solution since computers do not make mistakes. All of UniComp’s decisions are based on what would benefit the Family, it is all about efficiency. One example is that all members die about the time they reach the age of 65 because elderly people are not as efficient as younger ones. To the members, this is completely natural since 65 years is very old. They do not know that UniComp kills all members who grow old. It is all for the sake of efficiency.

Members of the Family do not get to choose how they want to live, they are designated to different jobs early on so they know what to study and some are designated to have children while the rest will remain childless. They all live a highly controlled life where everything is scheduled: work, meals, TV-time and bedtime. To make things even more efficient the world has been divided into areas instead of countries and each city now has a code instead of a name: EUR0047, RUS41500 and so on. The same thing has happened to people’s names. Instead of having an endless amount of names to choose from there are now only 4 male names and 4 female names followed by a code i. e. Peace KD37T5002 called a nameber, but while it logically seems more efficient it also removes part of individual identity. All members should be considered the same which is taught to the younger members. This means
that one should not be too attached to another individual since there is no difference between members. We see an example of this when Chip talks with his advisor and she asks about something he had said to his grandfather on the phone.

‘What did you mean when you told your grandfather you were trying?’ she said.
‘Nothing,’ Chip said.
‘Li,’ Mary said and looked at him reproachfully. ‘You said you were trying. Trying what?’
‘Trying not to miss him,’ he said. ‘When he was transferred to Usa I told him I would miss him, and he said I should try not to, that members were all the same and any way he would call whenever he could.’
‘Oh,’ Mary said, and went on looking at Chip, now uncertainly. ‘Why didn’t you say so in the first place?’ she asked.
Chip shrugged.
‘And do you miss him?’
‘Just a little,’ Chip said. ‘I’m trying not to.’ (Levin 34-35)

Along with names, privacy has been limited to the extent that every member has to wear a bracelet that works as an ID tag. Whenever you leave or enter buildings or certain areas you have to touch a scanner with your bracelet, thereby notifying UniComp where you are.

In order to make sure that everyone is equal and has equal rights, there is no monetary system in this society. Members can claim food and supplies by using their bracelets at the checkout counter. In order to visit other areas members can claim trips and vacations. Everything seems to be rationed and each member can only claim a fixed amount of each item during a period of time.

Family members regularly visit Medcentres to receive counseling as well as treatments said to consist of vitamins and medicines designed to keep the members healthy. Independent thoughts are considered to be signs of illness and require extra treatment. Since it is the obligation of every member to take care of other Family members, this leads them to turn in the sick member to the Medcentre where they can be treated back to health. The truth about the treatments, however, is that they also consist of tranquilizers and drugs designed to lower
the sex drive and keep the members content whilst making them unable to think for
themselves, thus turning them into ideal members of the family with a firm belief in the
almighty UniComp.

Even though members of the Family only know of UniComp as their supreme guide and
guardian there is a group of programmers who determine how UniComp shall work. They
function as this society’s politicians and, since they have no monetary interests, are genuinely
concerned about the well being of the Family. These programmers keep themselves hidden
from the Family so only those who break free and attempt to overthrow UniComp become
aware of their existence. This group has placed clues around the world that will lead
freethinkers to freedom. By almost succeeding in destroying UniComp a member passes some
kind of rite of passage that will make him/her worthy of a place among these people who
literally have the power to decide whether the members live or die. They hold meetings where
they discuss what they should change in the UniComp programs.

A very interesting aspect of this society is that there seems to be very little difference between
male and female. One guess is that the treatments also contain hormones in order to decrease
the gender differences. When Chip first meets the woman Lilac, he is very surprised by her
appearance since she has breasts, which is something he has not seen before. There is also a
section in the book where Chip and a girl are talking and the girl starts to believe that Chip is
sick because of his pre-U thinking. “‘Ah, Anna,’ he said. ‘Ah, come on. I said I was sorry,
didn’t I? Come on, let’s fuck again. I’ll suck you first if you want.’

After a while she relaxed her thighs and let him tickle her.” (Levin 37)

The fact that the word suck is used here feels strange and seems to suggest the existence of a
female penis, which would mean that there would be very few physical differences (if any)
between a man and a woman. When we read this dialogue we see another characteristic of this
society: their use of language.

Members address each other very formally, even within the closest family circle. There is no
cursing or slang the way we know it but there are words that are seen as foul since they
describe negative feelings or actions that are not accepted in their society. Some taboo words
are fight and hate. They are considered to be extremely foul words since they contain negative
emotions and suggest aggressive actions that were used during the Pre-U era when, according
to Family history, everything was chaos.
Chip talks about these words with his advisor after being with Papa Jan who uses this bad language.

’He uses that word,’ Chip said; ‘F-blank-blank-blank-T,’
‘Old members sometimes do that too,’ Bob said. ‘They don’t really mean anything by it. Words aren’t in themselves “dirty”; it’s the actions that the so-called dirty words represent that are offensive. Members like your grandfather use only the words, not the actions. It’s not very nice, but it’s no real sickness. (Levin 31)

There seems to be only one language used throughout the world in order to make transfers and communication more efficient and there seems to be no regional dialects or accents that distinguish one area from another. Since the language is very formal the individuality of it has been erased, everyone speaks the same way and in the same manner thus making everyone the same even in speech. One could very well say that the language is a reflection on their society; both are highly structured, formal, impersonal and emotionless. In this novel the language works as a way to emphasize the strictness of the Family.

Something that becomes quite apparent is that the language has been modified to minimize the ways to express emotions of any kind. The term used for sexual interactions is *fuck*, which suggests that there are no emotions involved in the act. It is only a physical action that is performed in order to feel good, the word usage also suggests that since there are no emotions involved, the partner can be almost anyone. If a member gets sent to another area he/she will have to find another sexual partner within that area.

Although there are many negative aspects to their society there is one that appears truly positive: the environmental perspective. People in this novel use bikes to go for smaller trips and monorails or airplanes for longer journeys, which suggests that there is very little pollution. This fact adds to the illusion of a perfect society since everything is clean and wholesome on the surface, even the weather is controlled so the Family can always enjoy perfect weather. There seems, however, to be very little wildlife in this world. The only time the book tells of animals is when Chip visits the zoo and looks at animals. Whether this is due to the absence of wildlife altogether or simply because the characters never venture out where
wild animals might be encountered can only be answered by the author himself. But since everything else in this society is manipulated one can suspect that there are gardeners or terrain planners that design forests and make sure that all danger (wildlife) is eliminated or placed in zoos.

The environmental aspect is one of the most obvious differences between *This Perfect Day* and *Neuromancer* since pollution is very obvious in Gibson’s book. It quickly becomes evident that this is a world gone very wrong. The description of Sprawl gives the reader a clear picture of this:

> Now he slept in the cheapest coffins, the ones nearest the port, beneath the quartz-halogen floods that lit the docks all night like vast stages; where you couldn’t see the lights of Tokyo for the glare of the television sky, [...] and Tokyo Bay was a black expanse where gulls wheeled above drifting styrofoam. [...] By day the bars down Ninsei were shuttered and featureless, the neon dead, the holograms inert, waiting, under the poisoned silver sky. (Gibson 6)

The environment is a reflection of society: filthy, decaying and violent. It is a decentralized society ruled by multinational corporations and criminal organizations where the first often includes the second. In Gibson’s dystopian society we see very little evidence of existing political parties, we hear nothing about world leaders or presidents. The only encounter with an agency of sorts is when Case is arrested by the Turing cops. The Turing registry is an agency which keeps track of AIs and makes sure that they do not grow beyond their restrictions. During the interrogation another kind of agency is mentioned. “‘One thing,’ Case said . . . ‘Do you guys have any real jurisdiction out here? I mean, shouldn’t you have the Freeside security team in on this party? It’s their turf, isn’t it?’” (Gibson 156). One could interpret this as if there was no real police force and that different security teams are in charge of public order, almost as if the entire world is under martial law and the army upholds the law. We hear, however, nothing about political parties. It seems as if the supreme rulers are the corporations or Zaibatsus as they are referred to. These are explained to be almost like living organisms and are almost indestructible. The Internet site Project Cyberpunk discusses the concept of power like this:
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.

Since corporations rule the world it can be seen as a capitalist society where nothing matters except profit. Without politicians to set the rules for them the corporations can do as they please without regard for people’s sufferings and pollution of the environment. This society holds no real possibilities for a normal person. To become someone you would either have to work for a Zaibatsu and hope for success within the corporation or take huge risks to try to succeed by yourself. Many people seem to choose a life of crime, be it smuggling, murder, drugs or dealing with information or hardware. Crime seems to be a fairly logical choice for people who are not under a zaibatsu’s wings. Unlike in PD there are many signs of diversity in Gibson’s novel, we see different cultures and classes. In Sprawl we find many low-class people: small-time criminals and prostitutes. On Freeside with its casinos and expensive shops we have the upper-class society and the final destination, Villa Straylight, is the home of the powerful Tessier-Ashpool family. We see clear differences between these different places and its inhabitants. The spoken language in NM also shows differences between cultures: the people in Sprawl use a lot more slang and fragmentary phrases than people at Freeside. The rastafarians in the Zion cluster speak in some kind of Jamaican English. Much like in PD the spoken language in NM serves as a reflection of society, with many nuances and differences. In the poorer areas the language is more low-class but also more personal while in the upper-class areas the language is more correct but lacks character. In that sense the language usage can be seen as similar in the novels but as a difference between the two societies. The linguistic usage to make the storytelling itself feel in sync with the societies of which it tells is not limited to only the spoken words.
Narrative Strategies

As with their stories the narrative structures of these novels differ, perhaps in order to accentuate the mode of the stories. The differences discussed here are the use of mimesis and diegesis and how time is used in the story. Peter Barry describes these two narrative modes in his book *Beginning Theory: an introduction to literary and cultural theory*.

‘Mimesis’ means ‘showing’ or ‘dramatising’... [and] is ‘slow telling’, in which what is done and said is ‘staged’ for the reader, creating the illusion that we are ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing’ things for ourselves. By contrast, ‘diegesis’ means ‘telling’ or ‘relating’. The parts of a narrative which are presented in this way are given in a more ‘rapid’ or ‘panoramic’ or ‘summarising’ way. (Barry 231)

The difference between mimesis and diegesis is that with mimetic writing the author tries to make the reader see and feel the events by presenting emotions, thoughts and sensory reactions. Diegesis, on the other hand, tells the reader about the events in a summarizing way. One could see it roughly as the difference between a poem about love and a news text in a morning paper.

If we look at the timeframes of both books we see that Levin’s story is played out over a period of 31-33 years while the active part of Gibson’s only deal with a couple of months. In order to succeed in effectively telling a story Levin has to use diegesis to a greater extent than Gibson since he has to account for years of Chip’s life that have no real relevance to the story. Since Levin’s story starts when Chip is 6 years old and follows him throughout his life there is little need for flashbacks. The story about Chip is told in a chronological order with diegetic summaries to move the story forward in time.

Between July of 153 and Marx of 162, Chip had four assignments: two at research laboratories in Usa; a brief one at the institute of Genetic Engineering in Ind, where he attended a series of lectures on recent advances in mutation induction; and a five-year assignment at a chemo-synthetics plant in Chi. He was upgraded twice in his classification and by 162 was a genetic taxonomist, second class. (Levin 53)
In *NM* Gibson also uses diegesis but not as often as Levin. He uses flashbacks to tell the reader about past events and although the main story is told chronologically it at times feels as if the story itself jumps back and forth through time. Most of the novel is told in a mimetic manner, but there is one particular part of the story which contains a diegetic narrative that stands out: the end of the novel. The reason why this particular part stands out is that up until now Gibson has used a very expressive way of telling his story but the end, which can be seen as important, is, more or less, summarized.

He spent the bulk of his Swiss account on a new pancreas and liver, the rest on a new Ono-Sendai and a ticket back to the Sprawl.
He found work.
He found a girl who called herself Michael.
And one October night, punching himself past the scarlet tiers of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority, he saw three figures, tiny, impossible, who stood at the very edge of one of the vast steps of data.
(Gibson 260)

The 6 lines that follow this excerpt are told in the same mimetic way as the rest of *NM* but the lines above differ so much from the rest of the novel that one immediately reacts to it. In *NM* we can read about Case’s emotions and sensory reactions to the extent that we can almost feel them ourselves. In *PD* however, we are being told about how Chip feels and acts but we do not get any closer descriptions of the emotions or actions which makes the novel more easy to read and more comprehensible but also less colorful.

When comparing the narrative strategies alongside with the societies of which they speak it seems plausible that the narratives might have been consciously chosen in order to increase the feel of their respective societies. In Levin’s case the summarizing and more factual way of writing gives the text a feel of solid structure and hints towards cold perfection which is the way the Family is portrayed. Gibson’s writing, however, has a more emotional and chaotic feel which suits his decaying society very well. The written language accentuates the mood of the stories just as the language spoken by their inhabitants does. Just as the language has been used to enhance the mood, the characters in these novels also contribute to the feel of the stories. This strategy also makes the text more steady and fluent since the narrative text follows the same rules as the dialogues. Had Levin in *PD* written a description using slang or
fragmented sentences it would stand out from the rest of the text and probably disturb the reader by being out of rhythm. Of course, the same rule applies for NM where a strictly factual text like the ones in PD would stand out like the end of NM does.

Characters

Chip

Chip’s real nameber, as it is called, is Li RM35M4419 but his grandfather always called him Chip as in “chip of the old block.” This might seem insignificant but it makes him stand out in the eyes of the reader since it hints towards the fact that he is not what he seems and that he is different from all the others. He also stands out physically since he was born with one green and one brown eye which makes him different from other members. This could be a sign of duality in character: On one hand he is a standard member of society, whilst on the other he is a freethinker, a danger to society. It could also be seen as a hint towards him becoming sick. In all other aspects he is much like other members: caring, selfless, polite and honest. The only thing that makes Chip different, psychologically, is that he becomes a thinker of independent thought. One good example is when he meets a member named Karl WL35S7497 at the zoo where Karl is drawing animals:

‘This is – great, Karl ! Top Speed !’
‘It’s not accurate,’ Karl said.
‘It is!’
‘No it isn’t ,’ Karl said. ‘If it were accurate I’d be at the Academy of Art.’
[ . . .] ‘You’re right,’ [Chip] said, looking at the drawing again. ‘It’s not accurate. But it’s – it’s somehow better than accurate.’ (Levin 43)

Chip’s encounter with Karl is of great importance to the way he evolves as an individual. After telling his advisors about some of Karl’s drawings which contain people without bracelets, thus sentencing Karl to treatment, Chip feels bad. Even though he has been taught that it is the right and responsible way to help members who are sick, he feels as if he has betrayed his friend. This helps to strengthen his doubts towards society and its rules and turns him into a stronger individual. His character goes through many changes back and forth
during the story but in the end he has evolved from an obedient automaton into the savior or destroyer of the Family, depending on the outcome.

**Lilac**

The main female character also differs from other members physically just like Chip, she has breasts which is something Chip has never seen before. This fact that she is apparently different gives the reader a hint that she will become important to Chip. When we meet her for the first time she is a member of a small group of freethinkers who meet in the museum at night. She is together with the leader and founder of the group, King, who is an older man. During the time they are in this group Lilac comes across as a strong and free-spirited woman but her character makes a turn after Chip is caught and after treatment tells about their secret society which sentences everybody to treatment. She becomes a more stereotyped woman, helpless and, in some sense, weak. When she and Chip arrive at the island of incurables her character takes another turn and she becomes a typical housewife in a working class home. This does not mean that she has grown weaker, instead she is the one supporting Chip and she stands by him through thick and thin. No matter how hard their life seems to be she is there by his side. This shows great strength, Chip is the one who gets depressed by their situation while she supports him through it. She has become a strong feminine woman even though many people tend to look at a housewife as a weak person. She is the one who is in charge of the home and keeps it clean as well as trying to help her husband in any way she can.

Lilac as a character goes through quite drastic changes: she starts out as a strong free-thinking woman, later turns into a stereotyped damsel in distress and ends up as a strong but yet somewhat stereotyped housewife.

**Case**

When the readers first meet Case at the bar Chatsubo he comes across as a very bitter man who does not like people getting too close to him. He is sarcastic, bad-tempered and ill mannered. It appears that he dislikes the fact that Ratz, the bartender, seems to care about him and tries to talk some sense into Case who is almost over the edge. We learn, early on in the novel, that Case once was a highly skilled hacker who worked for different criminal organizations. After some time, he fell victim to his own greed and stole some money from
his employers, believing that they would not notice, but they did. They let him keep the money, as he would need it since he would never be able to work again. “They damaged his nervous system with a wartime Russian mycotoxin . . . Case fell into the prison of his own flesh” (Gibson 6). After realizing that there was no way to repair the damage done to him he had given up all hope of ever breaking free from his shackles. The Case we meet in the beginning is the scum of society, a drug addict, small-time thief and murderer with a deathwish. He is not in any way a likeable character. One of the few glimpses of conscience we see in him is the fact that he urges his old girlfriend to accept money from him. This seems to be an act of a guilty conscience since he was the one who turned her into an addict like himself; he had destroyed something innocent and beautiful and feels guilty for it.

As a protagonist Case is not very likeable since he is only driven by his own self-preservation; if he succeeds in releasing the AI Wintermute he will be able to use the Cyberspace but if he fails he will once again be a prisoner in his own body. He starts out as a bitter and somewhat selfish man and this does not change a lot through the novel. It might be that he has grown accustomed to being left by the people he cares about so he keeps himself from being hurt by being emotionless. A good example of this is his relationship with Molly. Even though he feels affection towards her, he does not really seem to care when she leaves him. One of the few times he actually expresses emotions is when he becomes braindead during a hacking run. He suddenly meets his old girlfriend Linda in an arcade not knowing that he is in the Matrix. He feels disoriented but seems quite relieved that he is there. Suddenly it all disappears and he realizes that it wasn’t real and that an AI had created that scenario in order to talk to Case. “I had a cigarette,’ Case said, looking down at his white-knuckled fist. ‘I had a cigarette and a girl and a place to sleep. Do you hear me, you son of a bitch? You hear me?’” (Gibson 115). At the end of the novel we learn that he ends up as a console cowboy in Sprawl so he’s back where he first started before his imprisonment.

**Molly**

When we first see Molly we see her as a strong woman, a cold-blooded killer who shows very little emotion. She works as muscle for Case’s employer Armitage, and is a straightforward woman with a kind of bitter irony. She is not what you would expect from a woman and her character shows very few glimpses of femininity. Later on in the novel we learn about her past as a prostitute, or meat puppet as it is described, where parts of her brain were
disconnected when she had a customer so that she would not be conscious during the act. This, however, backfires and she ends up killing one of her customers and had to go into hiding.

Except for Linda Lee and 3Jane, Molly is the only female character the reader really gets to know. There are a few minor characters but they are given very little place in the book and the reader does not get to know much about them so it is not easy to see how the situation for females in general is in this society. However, since many female characters in Gibson’s book seem to be prostitutes it is easy to draw the conclusion that prostitution is a fairly common way for women to earn money if they are unemployed, since the criminal path Case has chosen would probably be more suited for a man because of the physical differences. An altered female, however, would probably be more successful than a male but the price is her femininity. One can say that in order for a woman to survive on the streets in Gibson’s society she has to either allow others to abuse her femininity or to give it up voluntarily and become a man. There is no place in the streets for ordinary women.

If we were to compare the main characters from these two novels we would see that the character development in PD is much more apparent than in NM. Chip and Lilac go through great changes throughout the novel and end up as completely different individuals from when they started. In NM, however, it seems as if the characters undergo less of a development. Case and Molly are quite stagnant characters and in the end of the novel they are almost the same as when they started. Even though Case is no longer a drug addict with a death wish it is about the only change we see in him as a character. He is back where he first started out in Sprawl before his so called imprisonment. If we look at how the different stories unfold and how the characters’ actions affect their societies we could state that their development can be seen as reflections of their societies. Chip’s and Lilac’s actions force their world into a great change just as what they go through changes them, while Case’s and Molly’s actions have little effect on their society. Their world remains the same as if nothing important had happened. Instead of changing the world they have preserved the status quo.
Discussions on Technology

In both novels, technology plays a great part and is a central theme. The stories give hints on what will happen if we rely too much on technology. This is a topic that is very important to look at considering our present-day society since we are not far away from any of the societies depicted in these books where in both stories, technology serves as the great enemy that has to be taken down.

I recognize the fact that Levin wrote his book during the 70s and Gibson during the mid-80s and that there had been a great revolution in computer technology in between the two books. During the 70s computers were complicated machines mostly used by companies and not many people had ever used a computer. In the mid-80s personal computers and what I refer to as game-computers such as Sinclair, MSX, Vic-20 and the Commodore 64 started to appear, so in that sense Gibson would be at some advantage when it comes to describing computer technology. It is, however, a well-known fact that Gibson had no knowledge about computers and in the documentary Cyberpunk (Intercon Production) he claims that it was probably his lack of knowledge that made his descriptions of computers and cyberspace so innovative. Since he did not know how computers worked, he was not limited in his visions by what would be technologically possible. In the light of this fact I believe that both authors were almost on the same level of computer knowledge when they wrote their books and therefore can be compared to each other.

In This Perfect Day members are surrounded by technology although it is not as apparent as in Gibson’s novel. The entire world is governed by the super-computer UniComp that decides everything from which occupation a member will have to if a member will have children or not. All members have bracelets as identification and have to touch scanners whenever they claim something or go anywhere. Since there is only one UniComp that keeps track of every scanner, every claim, and makes a high number of decisions for different areas per day, this has to suggest a massive terminal-based network. The network has to be very fast with a server that can make almost infinite amounts of calculations per second since there seems to be no delays between bracelet-touches and replies from UniComp. In other words: It is a very fast and effective system. The absence of money is another factor, money has been replaced
with a system of claiming where all members are entitled to their share so there is no injustice. To keep track of every member and whether they have used up their claims or not requires a massive amount of computer storage and power so a super-computer or a network of powerful ones would be necessary for the task.

If we look at the medical aspects of this society we can clearly see that they are quite advanced. The constant use of drugs with almost no mention of unwanted side effects, they have found the perfect mix of drugs to make members function the way society wants without anyone having headaches or nausea after a treatment. The only time we hear about any side effects is when Chip is told to act tired, uninterested and disorganized in order to make his advisor believe that he has been over-treated so his dose will be decreased. This suggests that there are cases where people suffer side effects caused by overdose, which means that even though their technology is advanced, it is not perfect. We can also draw another conclusion about medical technology from looking at the people who live in this society: they probably have some kind of genetic engineering. Members look almost the same, which suggests that they are being engineered that way. One probability is that a pregnant woman receives additional drugs with her regular treatment, it would be easy to explain if she felt any difference in these treatments as added nutrition for the fetus and medication to strengthen the immune system. This way the medcentre can genetically alter the fetus into becoming a standard member instead of an individual. Even though the system at first does not sound like a bad idea Levin uses UniComp as a symbol of the great oppressor in his novel. The main reason for this can be found in the dialogue between Chip and his grandfather Papa Jan when they have sneaked into the cavern where UniComp resides.

Chip hugged his blanket more tightly around him. ‘It’s not as nice as upstairs.’ he said.

‘No,’ Papa Jan said. ‘No pretty young members with pens and clipboards down here. No warm lights and friendly pink machines. It’s empty down here from one year to the next. Empty and cold and lifeless. Ugly.’ . . .

‘Why is it so cold?’ Chip asked, watching his breath.

‘Because it’s dead,’ Papa Jan said, then shook his head. (Levin 26)
Papa Jan feels that man should have choices in life and that they should at least be led by a human with emotions who can make decisions not only through cold logic. By obeying a machine they have become machines themselves, incapable of independent thought.

The technological theme is much more apparent in Gibson’s novel. Most people rely heavily on technology and things we can hardly imagine are standard products. The most obvious subject is his vision of cyberspace. It is a huge network, in many ways similar to our Internet but with one big difference. Instead of watching Internet pages on a screen you jack into the matrix by connecting electrodes to your body and nervous system so that you see Cyberspace like a hallucination. This system has many advantages compared to the Internet; one of them is that you have almost complete freedom in cyberspace to move around instead of clicking from one page to another. It is more like Virtual Reality. One major drawback is that since you physically connect to the Matrix, viruses and malicious programs can do real and severe damage and in some cases kill you. We can see one big difference between NM and PD in the fact that in NM there is an agency focused on keeping track of AI’s to make sure that they do not break loose. This means that man does not have complete trust in technology and sees it as a potential threat whereas in PD the members have complete and blind faith in that UniComp does everything right.

As in PD medical technology in NM is very advanced but in a more crude manner. We see people with implants, prosthetic limbs and biosofts, but with society being the way it is this technology is not being used for the common good. Only those with enough money can reap the benefits of this technology, and since the world is so profit oriented the different clinics keep their break-throughs for themselves in order to gain more money from needing patients who have nowhere else to go. Most implants and biosofts are designed to increase your capabilities and, if you can afford it, make you better than others so that you have a greater chance of making it in the world. It is all designed for personal gain.

In PD we have great technological advances that are designed for the common good and are available to anyone in need. Cosmetic surgery and implants to improve a member’s capacity are unheard of since everyone has to remain on the same level. In NM, however, cosmetic surgery seems to be a mainstream concept. Biosofts and neural implants that boost your mental and physical performance seem to be nothing out of the ordinary. Both societies seem to have some kind of Internet but in PD it is used to keep track of members and to instruct
them on what they should do. In NM this technology is used mostly by corporations and hackers. Since the zaibatsus want to keep people away from their homes in the matrix they have designed ICE and virus programs that attack people who come too close. This artificial world is quite similar to the real world where one wrong step can easily get you killed.

We can clearly say that the technology presented in these novels depicts their societies: In PD the technology is based on common good and is made free for all, while in NM technology is based on personal gain and the zaibatsus desperately guard their secrets like dragons guarding their treasures.

**Discussions on society**

Since there is no monetary system in PD and everything is rationed to the members in equal amounts everyone is in a way economically equal. It is a functioning Communist state. There is no inflation or depression due to monetary value and there is no competition between different corporations since there is no such thing as monetary profit. We have a totalitarian government that sets the rules for how the inhabitants should live and the rules are strict. These rules are enforced through a kind of psychological scare-tactic where everyone who is different is to be considered ill and in need of treatment. This is a more elaborate way of bending peoples’ will than, as in The Oceania of George Orwell’s novel *1984* where the government is resorting to torture and use a violent, high-profile police force as scare tactics. The method used in PD is a peaceful but very effective way to keep people from going astray and no one blames the ruler for enforcing the laws since it is for the common good and every violation is a sign of illness that must be treated to prevent it from spreading and growing worse. This fear of illness has lead to the members monitoring themselves and acting as informers whenever a member shows any signs of free thought.

In NM people have more personal freedom even though it is almost impossible for a single individual to make it by himself. Nevertheless, people are free to try. The only realistic way of making it in this world is to become an employee for a zaibatsu and thereby become a small part of something powerful. There seems to be a total absence of political authority, which results in a law-of-the-jungle society where the weak are eaten by the strong. This absence of politicians has also resulted in massive pollution since the corporations can do whatever they
like without regard for any environmental regulations. The Turing Registry which seems to be the only real agency in this novel seems to be a lot like the NSA or CIA with agents working internationally. This agency is named after the English cryptographer and founder of Computer Science Alan Turing (1912-1954) who was one of the first people to discuss Artificial Intelligence. He also designed a test that would decide whether a computer could be considered an AI, this is referred to as the Turing test. The Turing registry’s main object is to monitor AIs and prevent them from growing stronger and going out of control. Even though they can be seen as a futuristic version of slave owners they are quite important since a free AI could easily overpower the entire world. This is one of the negative effects of a society that relies too much on technology just as we do today. The most probable reason, however, for Gibson’s society becoming so bleak and dysfunctional is the absence of political control.

If we were to consider the two societies as different workplaces we would probably get better results from the company that has clean workspaces and a functional management that cares about its employees, whereas we would probably get poor results from a company with cluttered workspaces and an elitist management that cares only about profit with no concern for its employees. A society cannot achieve greatness without good leadership. Even though the government in PD leaves much to be desired, it is still better than no leadership at all. If there was an active political party in NM with enough power to take charge and set up rules and regulations for the zaibatsus to follow, I believe that this dystopia would go through a positive change.

Final note

As a final note I would say that our present society in some ways resemble both of these societies. We see that multinational corporations become increasingly powerful and that politicians tend to pay more attention to economics than the common good. The technological advances we have made are eerily similar to those in Neuromancer and most corporations try to profit from their findings as much as possible with no regard for the common good. As in This Perfect Day we are increasingly being monitored through our credit card transactions and by computer spyware. Drugs have become a common solution for the increasing depression among people today. Instead of trying to solve the problems of a patient that suffers from depression, doctors rather prescribe drugs that will help the patient endure the pain of living a troubled life.
In both novels technology is presented as something dark and ominous and it is easy to look at it that way, but it all comes down to how it is being used. Technology can become a great weapon that will destroy mankind but it can also become a tool with which we can evolve as a species and become better. In the end it is up to the politicians and corporate leaders to decide what kind of future they want to leave for their children. Will we see a Utopia or a Dystopia? I hope for neither, but a change is definitively needed.
Works Cited


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