

cyberpunk part two cultural blotches

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In the last article, I introduced the concept of Cyberpunk, a literary term that romanticizes the prospect of a world which is less than perfect. Pepper that with some glorious technological advances with the abundance of violence and we have a pseudotopian vision planted in many people's heads. Some individuals have embraced this concept, and have devoted themselves to learning more about this imaginary "dream world." Cyberpunks, as they like to be called, have developed an acute perspec-

tive on what kind of media is related to their beliefs. The media shall be my focus, as I will suggest various films, books, and forms of music that embody the word.

books

Novels initiated Cyberpunk, and in order to gain an understanding of any depth, one must follow-up their interest with study. I haven't taken the time to do so myself, so I shall use another source that will better educate you. Here is an extract from a Cyberpunk FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) file compiled by Erich Schneider (erich@bush.cs.tamu.edu) which lists many appropriate novels.

The following is intended to be a short list of the best in-print Cyberpunk works. Note that quite a few works written before 1980 have been retroactively labeled Cyberpunk, because of stylistic similarities (like Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*), or similar themes (Brunner's *The Shockwave Rider*, Delany's *Nova*).

William Gibson

Neuromancer is about a cracker operating in cyberspace, a cybernetically-enhanced bodyguard/mercenary, and a pair of mysterious artificial intelligences. It got the ball rolling as far as Cyberpunk is concerned. It won the Hugo, Nebula, Philip K. Dick, and Ditmar awards, something no other SF work has done. Gibson wrote two sequels in the same setting, *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*.

Burning Chrome. A collection of short stories that contain three stories in *Neuromancer's* setting, as well as several others, such as the excellent "The Winter Market" and "Dogfight."

Virtual Light. Gibson's most recent work. It is set nearer in the future and has somewhat more toned down technology, but deals with the same thematic concerns as other Cyberpunk works.

Bruce Sterling

Crystal Express. Contains his "Shaper/Mechanist" short stories about the future of humanity and "post-humanity," as well as "Green Days in Brunei," a story sharing the global setting of his *Islands in the Net*. Both are near-future extrapolations in worlds very similar to our own. (Schismatrix, a novel-length story in the "Shaper/Mechanist" future, is out of print.) Sterling's second collection is named *Globalhead*.

Mirrorshades: A Cyberpunk Anthology. Contains stories by many authors; some are questionably Cyberpunk, but it has some real gems ("Mozart in Mirrorshades" being one). Sterling's most recent work is *Heavy Weather*, which, although it may not address the "fight the oppressor" theme, does address the "individualist technology" theme.

Gibson and Sterling

The Difference Engine. A collaboration called 'steampunk' by some; it deals with many Cyberpunk themes by using an alternative 19th-century Britain where Babbage's mechanical computer technology has been fully developed.

Neal Stephenson

Snow Crash. Carries Cyberpunk to a humorous extreme; what else can one say about a work where the Mafia delivers pizza and the main character's name is Hiro Protagonist?

Larry McCaffrey

Storming the Reality Studio. An anthology edited by McCaffrey, which contains snippets of many Cyberpunk works, as well as critical articles about Cyberpunk, and a fairly good bibliography.

Walter Jon Williams

Hardwired. A smuggler who pilots a hover tank decides to take on the Orbital Corporations that control his world.

Voice of the Whirlwind. A corporate soldier's clone tries to discover what happened to his "original" copy.

Greg Bear

Blood Music. A genetic engineer uplifts some of his own blood cells to human-level intelligence, with radical consequences.

Pat Cadigan

Synners. Hackers and other misfits pursue a deadly new virus when direct brain interfaces first appear in near-future LA.

[Some good out-of-print works to look for are Sterling's *Schismatrix*, Pat Cadigan's *Mindplayers*, Michael Swanwick's *Vacuum Flowers*, Daniel Keyes Moran's *The Long Run*, and Vernor Vinge's short story "True Names."]

films

→ *Bladerunner*. Cameramen are to cameras as *Bladerunner* is to Cyberpunk. Well, perhaps the relationship is not that close in nature, but *Bladerunner* has become the theme film of many a Cyberpunk. *Bladerunner* (1982) stars Harrison Ford (*Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*) as Deckard, Sean Young (*A Kiss Before Dying*, *Dune*) as Rachael, Darryl Hannah (*The Clan of the Cave Bear*) as Pris, and Rutger Hauer (*Ladyhawke*) as Roy Batty. Director Ripley Scott (*The Duelist*, *Alien*) shot the *Bladerunner* footage in a uniquely grainy and monochromatic fashion. This style of filmmaking is known as film noir, but not many films



PHOTO BY BOYDE WENGER
Dick Dale recently broke his tailbone snowboarding, but that didn't stop him from wowing the crowd with his sounds of the surf guitar last Saturday at Fremont Street.

have achieved the beauty in the visual aspect of *noir* (which literally means "black" in French). In collaboration with Scott, Syd Mead, self-proclaimed "Visual Realist," constructed the intricate and fascinating buildings and spinners (hovering cars) that would allow viewers to submerge themselves in the setting of Los Angeles, November 2019.

Bladerunner may not ooze depth to a first-time viewer, but one would be surprised as to how much symbolism is contained within the film. Without getting too sidetracked, the simple theme of the film, in both the visuals and plot is both depressing and frightening. Some of the more obvious depressing elements of the film: incessant rainfall, the inevitable deaths of human-like androids, and the dark lit shooting locations. *Bladerunner* is frightening because it reflects much of how our society is today. Universal poverty, beings exiled for their biological identities, and the confusion of the hunter, as to why he hunts.

→ *The Lawnmower Man*. Based on a very short story by Stephen King, *The Lawnmower Man* (1991) stars Pierce Brosnan (The new James Bond to star in *Goldeneye*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*) as Angelo and Jeff Fahey (*Body Parts*) as Jobe, a semi-retarded lawnmower man. The film features spectacular visual effects, which have been re-released in the computer graphics video, *Beyond the Mind's Eye*, but beyond that, there was not much to get excited about. Other than the typical Hollywood elements of a film: sex and violence, *The Lawnmower Man* offered no refreshing ideas. Something that this film may have advocated, which I support, is that we cannot abuse the power of Virtual Reality, or technology in a broader sense. Jobe goes on a killing spree, which is a result of Angelo's efforts to increase his mea-

ger IQ through unexplored reaches in neurological research. Whether or not the writers of this film consciously tried to educate the public, I believe that most people were perceptive enough to pick up this concept. In any case, I would not recommend this film for anything other than the graphics, which can be seen in its original form in *Beyond the Mind's Eye*.

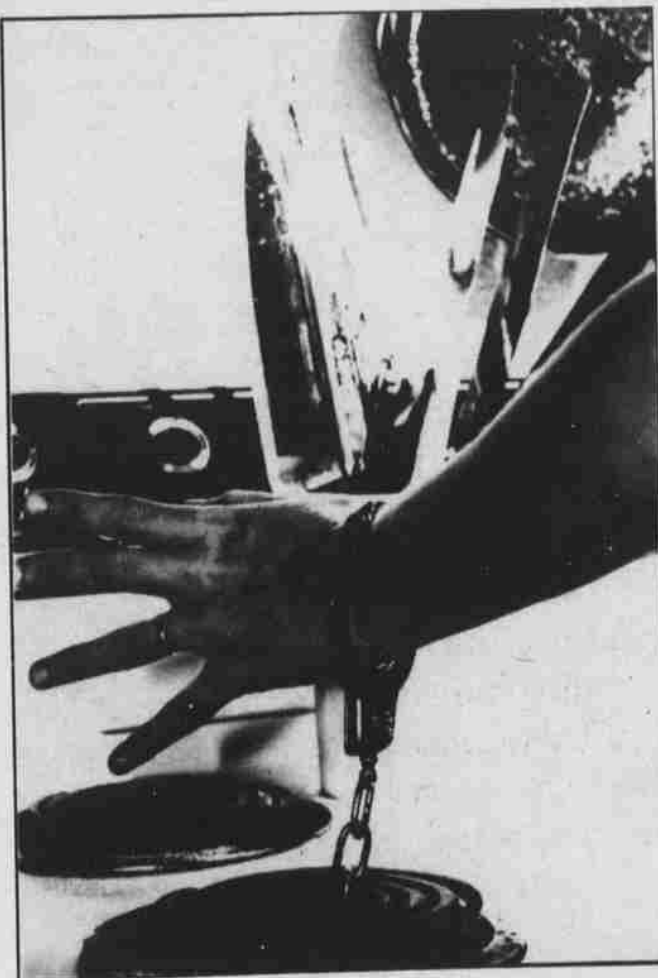
→ *TekWar*. Based on William Shatner's original novels, the *TekWar* television movies are based on a great deal of Cyberpunk ideas. I have heard that one episode contains a plot very similar to the Neal Stephenson novel, *Snow Crash*.

→ *Wild Palms*. Another eccentric David Lynch television miniseries that exploits the concept of Virtual Reality. I never caught this one while it was one the air, but I would like to see it.

music

This is probably the most difficult form of media to apply to Cyberpunk. For one, writing lyrics based on Cyberpunk novels is fine and dandy, but most Cyberpunks severely dislike this kind of music. One example that will bring a Cyberpunk to hysterical laughter is Billy Idol's *Cyberpunk*. A more obvious commercial intent to reach out to the masses could not have been made. Idol even dares to use *Neuromancer* as one of his song titles. Most Cyberpunks agree that if it had been a different artist, that this album may have been a success. Who are these artists? In trying to answer this question, we must jump back to the concept of the word. Having determined that irreverence and technology are the underlying themes of Cyberpunk, the possibilities of correlation are narrowed significantly. Industrial music has become the choice of the Cyberpunks.

Please see Cyber—9



A revolutionary new treatment for crack addicts will be introduced at Mr. Bondi's Soundhouse, a night of music, video, madness and belly dancers at Fremont Street Reggae and Blues, Tuesday, Feb. 21 at 9 p.m. Bands appearing include: Tippy Elvis, Hair Stuck to Tape and the Lower Oakeys, Project Program, Sex Monster, Fak-Shen and Vivian Circle. This event is a benefit show for the Committee for Public Safety and 91.5 FM KUNV.