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## POST-HUMAN: THE CULTURAL LIMITS OF "CYBERPUNK"

(INCLUDING AN ELECTRONIC  
CONVERSATION WITH BRUCE STERLING, AND HIS  
OWN SELECTED LIST OF CYBERPUNK READINGS)



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### 1. WHAT'S CYBERPUNK ALL ABOUT?

In his sixth and last column for the magazine *Interzone*, author Bruce Sterling remembers how the cyberpunk movement—and its consciously created poetics—sprouted in the early 1980s to die only a few years later. Cyberpunk, he confesses, "simply means 'anything cyberpunks write'" (1997: 2), in this way deferring the existence of any more precise definition of the new SF genre created by himself, William Gibson, Lewis Shiner, Rudy Rucker, and John Shirley. Here and there, however, the reader interested in defining the genre may find in the same article glimpses of what cyberpunk is for the author. Gradually, one may become aware, at least, of the postmodern and antihumanist stance of cyberpunk at the beginning of its literary adventure. The apparent aim was to renovate science fiction by incorporating into it a new narrative attitude, devoid of the old bourgeois and

capitalist values that still maintained man at the center of creation: no more humanist and rationalist views of man were to be defended in this new type of fiction. On the contrary, they were ready to show that the idea that there are sacred limits to human action is a traditional but illusory value. There are no sacred boundaries to protect humans from themselves, Sterling comments:

Our place in the universe is basically accidental. We are weak and mortal, but it's not the holy will of the gods; it's just the way things happen to be at the moment. And this is radically unsatisfactory; not because we direly miss the shelter of the Deity, but because, looked at objectively, the vale of human suffering is basically a dump. The human condition can be changed, and it will be changed, and is changing; the only real questions are how and to what end. (1997: 4)

In these words, readers interested in the contemporary American novel may quickly recognize echoes from certain canonical postmodern writers. In effect, the names of Vonnegut and Pynchon spring to mind: human beings are vulnerable, unstable creatures, subject only to accident and necessity who, far from improving their living conditions on the planet, are systematically destroying it. Early in the 1990s, Brian McHale was already suggesting that cyberpunk fiction overtly actualizes the new understanding of the world that other—more “serious”?—postmodernist fiction evokes or symbolizes by more subtle means (McHale 1992: chapters 10 and 11). A close analysis of some of the already canonical cyberpunk works shows that this SF genre corresponded, from its creation in the early 1980s, to a postmodernist understanding of life. In fact, for many critics cyberpunk fiction has become “the paradigmatic example of textuality in the age of information overload, the veritable cutting edge of the literature of the twenty-first century” (Collins 1995: 9). Not surprisingly, readers of the genre abundantly discover in its pages the elements—that soon became topoi—of the gloomy and fragmentary landscape, the rebellious anti-traditional (punk) protagonist, and the continual crossing of the humanist borders between the animate and the inanimate.

Cyberpunk, despite its apparent—and ultimate?—“indefinableness,” soon became a favourite genre for a postmodern generation who could not get rid of the humanist notion of “Man” as the center of creation—whence the allure of the tough guy/smart hacker protagonist who manages to defeat the system—even as they realized that man and the social systems created by and for him are destroying the planet and, consequently, all possibilities for the sur-

vival of the human race. Other readers will perceive in cyberpunk a deconstructive attack that its creators, according to Sterling, tried to carry out against the traditional values of the old master narratives. In this way, feminism, the instability of the subject, or class and race issues become aspects frequently analyzed by critics of cyberpunk (Haraway 1985, Sobchack 1994, Featherstone and Burrows 1995). However, it is our belief that the genre also stands at the cross-roads where typical SF stories underpinned by humanist modernism intersect with a more gloomy perception of the world and based on an awareness of the destructive power of the human being. Whether its creators wanted it or not, the genre has become a bridge between old humanist (and modernist) beliefs in a perfect creation and the new postmodern understanding of the world as a much more desolate place to live in (see Collins 1995: 12-13). The paradoxical side of the incorporation of these two different interpretations of life in cyberpunk pages, becomes clear if the three genre motifs mentioned above (the gloomy landscape, the existence of an individual and independent hero, and the transgression of the dichotomy animate/inanimate) are looked at in greater detail.

“The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel.” This sentence opens the story of Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (the novel that was soon converted into the keystone for the movement), a memorable parody—in the Hutcheonian sense—of Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* and also, some would say, of DeLillo’s *White Noise*: nobody pays attention to it any longer, but the TV set is permanently switched on, producing a background noise that fills the house up with deadly radiation—the clear indication of a human destructive power that has already escaped from our control. It is obvious that not all cyberpunk novels depict or foresee the same dystopic future for the human race, so *Neuromancer* cannot be taken as an absolute model when discussing cyberpunk predictions about our future in the planet, but it is also true that Gibson’s novel stands as a pathbreaker for other writers of the genre and that its pages soon became a *must* for readers interested in this new manifestation of SF. In any case, the bleak predictions that Gibson posits in his novel are also shared in the two other novels of his celebrated trilogy (*Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*) and strongly coincide with Sterling’s views on the topic even if—as he argues in the interview reproduced below—dystopia is a term that can only be used in a relativistic way.

There are, then, a number of elements which are present throughout the near-futuristic world of *Neuromancer* and that offer its readers a highly dystopic vision of life, probably inherited from the New Wave SF writers of the sixties and seventies. From the very beginning the planet we live in is

described as a very gloomy place, its inhabitants surrounded by remembrances of the past amidst a present state of decadence: in Japan, where the story starts, "Night City was like a deranged experiment in social Darwinism . . ." or "The Jarre was decorated in a dated, nameless style . . . leaving each surface fogged with something that could never be wiped away" (Gibson 1993: 14, 16). From New England down to Atlanta everything is now the Sprawl, a concrete jungle of desolation with different zones inhabited by the marginal poor or by the more successful rich. Decadence is everywhere around Case, the male protagonist. Wealth and life seem to slip past him wherever he goes, be it America, Japan or European Istanbul (1993: 107).

Both the impression and the effects of decadence are emphasized by the almost continuous presence of rain everywhere; even those events in Case's life that seem to be more important for the protagonist happen against a backdrop of rain ("He'd found her, one rainy night, in an arcade," 1993: 15). Ironically, the only place where there is a constant—artificial—good climate is in Freeside, the orbital city where the very rich live and which only wealthy tourists can visit, being at the same time a new perverse Babylon for the Rastafarian outsiders who live in the nearby Zion cluster. It is very telling that Case and his group attack the Tessier-Ashpools' residence—a Borgesian labyrinth in Freeside—, thus putting an end to their economic hegemony and bringing earthly decadence to the outer-space city. In the other two novels of the trilogy, readers discover that the rich family (whose members hibernated as caterpillars to stay alive) has lost its economic predominance when Case brings about a chain reaction that motivates the loss of the two Artificial Intelligences (AIs) the family owned. In *Count Zero*, the second book in the trilogy, the previously wealthy residence of the family is now a place of abandonment and decadence, where the AI Neuromancer (in earlier times almost omnipotent) ceaselessly creates new art forms out of the multifarious rejected objects that still float in its chamber (Gibson 1987: 217, 226-27).

As might be expected of a postmodernist narrative, the AI Neuromancer is not the only entity that transforms fragments of the past to create new artistic objects with them. Cyberpunk landscapes also become the actualization of a post-industrial society of simulacra where originals do not exist any longer (Baudrillard 1988). "Shin's pistol was a fifty-year-old Vietnamese imitation of a South American copy of a Walther PPK..." (Gibson 1993: 29): the original, as the Derridean primordial trace, is always already deferred. Gloomy, rainy, abundant in simulacra and refuse, cyberpunk landscapes suggest the Pynchonian ironic motifs of the above and the below, the rich and

the poor, the visible and the occult. Its pages are also saturated with plots and paranoia, with criminal groups that belong to the American Other (the Japanese, the Jamaican Rastafarians...) and try to control or, conversely, oppose the system. As Sterling put it in the above quotation from *Interzone*, in cyberpunk fiction "the vale of human suffering is basically a dump." Despite the adventure plot, cyberpunk pages can only depict a society in dissolution, subject to irreversible social entropy where there is almost no hope left. In a world with no God, that stands drastically divided between the poor and the rich, there is no longer place for the old bourgeois narrative of social improvement nor for the modernist belief in the power of the inner self to cure the individual and restore him or her to their proper place in the universe (see Campbell 1968, Jung 1971). Cyberpunk radically sticks to some of the basic ingredients of the postmodernist understanding of the world: within its bleak landscapes, protagonists frequently appear as parodied copies of the old American motif of the solitary hero who comes to face the problem a community has, fights and defeats the existing danger, and then goes back to his lonely life. However, cyberpunk "heroes" do not help resolve the moral opposition good/evil any longer: this old mythic dichotomy has become extremely problematic again. There are times when the main characters actually show a moral sense rooted in the old narratives—such is the case of the two protagonists of Gibson's *Virtual Light* (1993)—but the illusion of morality frequently disappears in many narratives where the state of world affairs seems to be practically irresolvable. In a planet dominated either by international corporations—Sterling's *Islands in the Net* (1988)—or by extremely rich individuals or family units—Gibson's trilogy—, the only aims of the protagonist (in clear parody of the modernist motif of the monomyth) are survival and a little social improvement: hence the long list of protagonist hackers, pirates, mercenaries, people who ride the matrix—cyberspace—with the one aim of feeling powerful for a little while and penetrating the defences of the big banks and corporations to steal a little money. As mentioned above, now and then a variety of gangs also appear, in order to help or destroy the solitary protagonists: technologically armed bands of multifarious origins, from punks to Japanese Yakuza or drug-addicted rastas, the social debris of late 20th-century America.

A punk protagonist, even without upholding the moral values of yore, must oppose something while fighting for his or her life. That something is obviously the system or, as one of the great predecessors of cyberpunk, Thomas Pynchon, would put it, the opponent is the conceited THEM (1973). But, who or what is behind the system? Men or machines? The old threat of civilized humans saturates cyberpunk fiction: the world is directly

controlled by machines that dominate corporate capitalism or by rich people like Virek or the Tessier-Ashpool family (in Gibson's trilogy) who, in their old age, survive thanks to the assistance of machines with which—it is their inmost dream—they attempt to integrate in one fused cyborgian entity.

The blurring of boundaries between animate human flesh and inanimate technology is complete in cyberpunk fiction. The artificial augmentation of human beings reaches a stage in which the old Aristotelian categories of form and substance physically collapse: the postmodern notion of the instability of the human subject continuously *materializes* in the pages of cyberpunk literature. Man has created artificial intelligences, even the artificial world of cyberspace and, in so doing, Man feels like God and takes over God's role in a world in which the old deity is no longer necessary. Frequently, cyberpunk characters live in undefined futuristic societies where the technological scares of the late 20th century have been fully realized: genetic manipulation and implantation techniques mix to create a new race of cyborgs, with human flesh being implanted with a large variety of technical devices that improve sensorial cognition or that allow their bearers to receive the impressions of somebody else—the famous “sim-stim” of *Neuromancer* or Dan Simmons' *Hyperion*—or even to mentally retrieve somebody else's past life—*Count Zero*. In all likelihood, however, the ultimate fusion human-machine is epitomized in one of the most recurrent motifs of this kind of fiction: the hacker-computer being navigating in cyberspace, that electronic zone with which Gibson anticipated in 1984 the forthcoming influence of virtual reality. In 1993, at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington DC, Sterling had already commented on the speedy way in which the human-technology interaction prophesied by cyberpunk writers was actually taking place: “What I thought was fifty years away,” he said, “was only ten years away—it was already here. I just wasn't aware of it yet.” In the same speech he confirmed cyberpunk's bleak [?] prophesy about the fusion of the human being into the machine:

in the future, computers will mutate beyond recognition. Computers won't be intimidating, wire-festooned, high-rise bit factories swallowing your entire desk. They will tuck under your arm, into your valise, into your kid's backpack. After that, they'll fit onto your face, plug into your ear. And after that—they'll simply melt. They'll become fabric. (Sterling and Gibson 1997)

In a sense—as Sterling himself recognizes in our interview—the time has already arrived when the cyborg has become real. At the end of the century, our interaction with the world around us is increasingly mediated by technology:

in the Western hemisphere (and speedily extending into the Eastern one) personal computers surround us at home and at work, producing addiction and new feelings and sensations in our human understanding of reality. What could be more aberrant for a humanist or for a modernist than the realization that many people are becoming devotees of this new form of transgressive fusion? Be that as it may, this already seems to be the case, or at least this is what Mark Dery maintains from the pages of *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (the on-line version, of course) when dealing with the particular attraction American viewers feel for the Borgs, those evil [?] hybrids of technology and biology that fight Captain Pickard and his crew in the TV series *Star Trek: The New Generation*:

According to Clark Fife, who works at New York's Forbidden Planet sci-fi bookstore and memorabilia shop, a cap-and-T-shirt set produced by a merchandiser to capitalize on the inexplicable appeal of the Borg—implacable *Star Trek* villains who function as a “hive mind,” or collective entity, and whose bleached flesh is interpenetrated by fetishistic high-tech prostheses—have proven wildly popular. The Borg are popular, says Fife, because they resonate with the cyberpunk sensibility and because “they're symbols of technological victimization that appeal to people.” Simultaneously, their cultish following bespeaks a pervasive desire among sci-fi readers, *Star Trek* fans, and other members of fringe technoculture to sheathe the body in an impenetrable carapace, render it invincible through mechatronic augmentation—a hypostatization, perhaps, of a creeping body loathing congruent with the growing awareness that wires are twined through all of our lives, that our collective future is written on confetti-sized flakes of silicon. (Dery 1993: 3)

No longer are good and evil a valid dichotomy to analyze the impact of the new cyborg in our culture, but the fact remains that former “permanent” limits have been trespassed, ironically actualizing Lacan's paradoxical and well-known assertion of “I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think.” Or, in his other famous words, “I think where I cannot say that I am” (Lacan 1977: 166). The Cartesian duality has physically collapsed in the fictional pages of cyberpunk, a literary warning that something is already taking place in the *real* world.

## 2. AN ELECTRONIC CONVERSATION WITH BRUCE STERLING

We have never seen him in person but his kindness and the help of computerized technology made this interview possible. We first contacted Bruce Sterling on February 2, 1997. As a result of his first answers we formulated a second series of questions on March 11. In answer to our request, Sterling also sent us the list of his recommended readings that can be found at the end of the interview.

### FIRST PART

**Q-** In 1993, at the National Academy of Sciences, in Washington, you said: "I used to think that cyberspace was fifty years away. What I thought was fifty years away, was only ten years away. And what I thought was ten years away—it was already here. I just wasn't aware of it yet." Do you think SF in general will always be a prophetic type of fiction, or will there be a day in which we find ourselves so completely surrounded by new technologies that writers will have to simply describe reality as it is (or seems to be)?

**A-** Well, this begs the question of "is SF itself a technology." SF does have a technological basis in print, paper, promotion, intellectual property rights and distribution practices. Literature in general is not something that stands entirely outside of society, gazing in all undisturbed. Literature requires mass literacy, printing presses, criticism, media empires, canons of academia. But even a completely nonhuman culture ought to be able to speculate about its circumstances and how those circumstances might change. We call that activity "science fiction" nowadays, but that term is only seventy years old and it isn't guaranteed to last indefinitely.

**Q-** Literary critics often mention the fact that cyberpunk constitutes a sort of postmodern amalgamation of high and low art because you still seem to write a kind of fiction for entertainment—for some, escapism—but at the same time it seems quite clear that you are also very fond of/influenced by the canonical prose written by people like Pynchon or DeLillo. What's your opinion about this? And, is there such a thing as high and low art in your understanding of contemporary fiction?

**A-** I'm very interested in social delineators like "high" and "low," or "establishment" and "bohemian," or "conservative" and "progressive," or "elitist" and "popular," or "classical" and "avant-garde." But those membranes

are very ductile, and they can turn from one to the other without much trouble at all. Thomas Pynchon's books are sold from a different aisle of the bookstore from my books, but I don't regard that commercial arrangement as a natural law of the universe, and I rather doubt that Thomas Pynchon does, either.

**Q-** In the article "Cyberpunk in the Nineties," which you published in *Interzone* several years ago, you affirm that cyberpunk is a Movement (with capitalised initial). Have your views changed in some way or other, or are they still the same?

**A-** Well, I think cyberpunk was a literary movement in the science fiction genre, but it's not as if we were Trotsky or Robespierre. Literary movements aren't revolutionary armies who swear loyalty until death, they're loose networks of artists who are trying to establish a contemporary sensibility. Cyberpunk writers are mortal human beings who are mired in historical circumstance just like other artists and thinkers. I think we had some modest successes, and we were remarkably prescient about some things, but many of our speculations were deeply wrong and based on assumptions that time has proven false. I've tried to stay true to a set of basic literary principles that I think allow people to write effective science fiction, so I've never denied being a "cyberpunk." But it would be very wrong-headed and self-defeating for a futurist to cling to the *Zeitgeist* of the year 1983.

**Q-** In the same article, you also stated that the future belonged to the future underground fiction. What is, in your opinion, the underground SF of the Nineties, and if such a thing exists, what are its similarities to and differences from cyberpunk?

**A-** There have been science fiction writers of great ability emerging in the 1990s, for instance, Neal Stephenson and Greg Egan. I don't believe there has really been a genuinely new "90s Movement" in Anglophone SF, however, and it is getting too late for one to start. I suspect there will be considerable turmoil in my field after the year 2000, which seems to offer an excellent chance to break decisively with 20th century traditions. The advent of multimedia, computer gaming and Internet have absorbed a lot of creative energy that might have gone into fiction writing.

**Q-** One of the most interesting issues you—and other cyberpunk writers—deal with in your fiction is the new type of human (?) being—connected to

the net—that emerges in your suggested near future. Do you think that we are moving towards a dystopic future or that the interaction person-machine is leading us towards a better kind of world, without gender or race barriers?

A- I think it's clear that we are heading for a profoundly different kind of world, but I don't think it's very accurate to ask if the 21st Century will be dystopian or utopian. That's like asking if the 19th Century was dystopian or utopian. For some people—for instance, most American Indian tribes—the 19th century was horribly tragic, but for others, like Victorian steam engineers, it seemed like a steady march toward ever greater power and glory. Seen from our own increasingly distant retrospect, the 19th century just seems increasingly odd and improbable.

Q- The issue that arises after our previous question concerns, of course, class: the economic views you foresaw in your famous "Islands in the Net" were not terribly optimistic. Money (epitomized by the pseudo-democratic Rizome corporation) is the ultimate weapon; your analysis of this factor was excellent but, perhaps, depressing. Is there any way out for us humans, or do you think we are definitely condemned to be exclusively ruled by economic corporations in the near future?

A- I am quite concerned about "commodity totalitarianism," a world in which every aspect of human existence is assumed to have a market price. But I don't think a civil society can exist when every man woman and child in it is a prostitute. Such a development is obsessive and fanatical and clearly bears the seeds of its own destruction.

Large corporations have proved to be surprisingly feeble and weak at commanding the allegiance and loyalty of people. I think there was a distinct chance that multinational corporations could have become quite powerful politically and economically, perhaps becoming oppressive semi-feudal organizations, but the opposite trend has occurred. Corporations have become slaves of their shareholders, pawns of the stock markets, and have lost all internal sense of tradition, loyalty, and continuity. They are cruel to their employees, dumping loyal followers without a second thought, and their managers and executive officers have no real loyalty to anything beyond their dividends. Corporations have not achieved any kind of serious sovereignty or permanent influence. I no longer consider them serious players in a global perspective.

To me a likely scenario is not rigid corporate authoritarianism, but something like contemporary Mexico, a very crowded world of weak busi-

ness, palsied governments, and extremely unstable economics; where currencies crash, casino style stock markets rise and fall at insane speed, and corrupt policemen engage in small-scale dirty war with breakaway ethnic groups. At the moment there are no large societies ruthlessly dominated by efficient corporations, but there is a strange similarity to the circumstances of Russia, Mexico, South Korea, Italy, Algeria, Yugoslavia, Turkey, Colombia, and Los Angeles, California. The future may already be here—it's just not well distributed yet.

## SECOND PART (March II):

Q- In our previous electronic conversation, when talking about the notion of cyberpunk as a literary movement, you said: "I've tried to stay true to a set of basic literary principles that I think allow people to write effective science fiction, so I've never denied being a 'cyberpunk.' But it would be very wrong-headed and self-defeating for a futurist to cling to the zeitgeist of the year 1983." So, what are those "basic literary principles" that you still stick to? And how would you qualify your own development as a science fiction writer since the early years of cyberpunk?

A- "Global awareness, imaginative concentration, visionary intensity, technological literacy." Carrying extrapolation into the fabric of daily life; an awareness that the street finds its own uses for things. These have always been basic cyberpunk literary principles. As time has passed and I've grown older, I've become less interested in visionary intensity, and more interested in the way in which wonderful, exciting things become boring, everyday, invisible things. I'm less imaginative and more patient now.

Q- There is another occasion in your answers in which you say that "there will be considerable turmoil in my field after the year 2000. The advent of multimedia, computer gaming and the Internet have absorbed a lot of creative energy that might have gone into fiction writing." Could you clarify how you think new technologies, especially the Internet, are going to affect SF? Is the "writer as cyborg" endangering SF?

A- I think writers can still make a big difference if they can think deeply and honestly. There haven't been many genuinely novel ideas in SF recently. The Internet may help this, though, in that good ideas could spread around the world really quickly now, were we ever to have any.

SF is endangered mostly by the collapse of magazine publishing, which has been traditionally the way in which new young writers broke into the field. SF is also growing much older and stodgier, but then, so is society generally. Most of SF's basic problems are shared by science, which is itself undergoing wrenching changes, and fiction generally, which also seems lack-luster lately. Science fiction's problems are not just our problems, they are general cultural problems.

The year 2000 will offer a good excuse to do radical things, or at least a good chance to clean house and throw out the twentieth century's rubbish.

**Q-** The world in which we live witnesses the appearance of new conflicts within and between countries almost every day. At the same time, the Internet and other kinds of computer networks link those very countries, even the so-called Third World countries, more and more. Do you think this kind of interconnection and the idea of the "global village" will help to decrease this type of conflicts?

**A-** Decrease some, increase others.

**Q-** Is the emergence of a "super-country" or world alliance thinkable, one which might gain control of the world thanks to the computer networks, as you suggested in *Islands in the Net* with the case of Vienna?


**A-** It could happen. But not necessarily.

**Q-** We asked you earlier whether you thought that we are moving towards a dystopic future. You answered that life in the future, as in the past, will favor some people and become "dystopic" for some others. Let's rephrase our question: one of the current questions when discussing cyberpunk or SF in general, is whether the "person-computer-net" entity that is sprouting out of the new technologies will favor the disappearance of gender and race barriers. What's your opinion about it?

**Q-** It's a pipe dream. There's no such thing as a "person-computer-net entity," and if there was, it would have problems of its own that would probably be even thornier than race and gender.

**Q-** Are you scared of the power of the machine? Or, as cyberpunk writers suggest, of humans "leaving the 'meat' behind"? How do you think this is

going to affect Western culture in the near future? Clonation is already here. Cyborgs, clones: are we at the beginning of the end of the human race?

**A-** I don't scare easily, and so far the only people who have ever "left the meat" are dead. On the other hand, I think that we are at the beginning of the end of the human race, but the so-called "end of the human race" is going to be a far more complicated, bureaucratic, and tedious process than one might imagine. By the time it's done the process will have become invisible; posthuman people will be so bored and blasé about the "end of the human race" that they won't even notice it's gone. 

## APPENDIX

BRUCE STERLING'S IDEA OF WHAT EVERY WELL-APPOINTED "CYBERPUNK SF" LIBRARY COLLECTION SHOULD POSSESS (circa January 1997).

### THE CANON

*Burning Chrome*, William Gibson. His short stories.

*Neuromancer*, *Count Zero*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, William Gibson. The "Cyberspace Trilogy."

*Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, Bruce Sterling, ed. Useful pointer to actual no-kidding Movement Cyberpunks.

*Mindplayers*, Pat Cadigan. Her best novel. An absolute must-have.

*Heatseeker*, John Shirley. Shirley's short-stories. His most significant and influential work.

*Deserted Cities of the Heart*, Lewis Shiner. His best SF novel.

*Slam*, Lewis Shiner. Intriguing cyberpunk mainstream non-genre novel.

*Software and Wetware*, Rudy Rucker. Best-known novels of deranged math-professor/hacker/cyberpunk.

*Transreal*, Rudy Rucker. Every short piece Rucker ever wrote. Enormous.

Like being hit in the head with a bowling ball.

*Blood Music*, Greg Bear. His most c-wordish book.

*Crystal Express*, Bruce Sterling. His short work.  
*Schismatrix*, Bruce Sterling. Posthuman space opera.  
*Islands in the net*, Bruce Sterling. 21st-century global information politics.  
*The Difference Engine*, William Gibson and Bruce Sterling. 19th-century cyberpunk by subgenre's foremost critics'-darlings.

## OTHER USEFUL FICTION:

*Virtual Light*, William Gibson. A new, more intimate view of the future by the gomi-no-sensei.  
*Idoru*, William Gibson. Light, graceful and brilliantly inventive.  
*Halo*, Tom Maddox. Remarkable SF treatment of robots and artificial intelligence. Now available online in its entirety at no charge.  
*Globalhead*, Bruce Sterling. His second story collection.  
*The Exploded Heart*, John Shirley. His second story collection.  
*Patterns*, Pat Cadigan. Cadigan's short work. Great range of topics and treatments.  
*Synners*, Pat Cadigan. Her well-received second novel.  
*Fools*, Pat Cadigan. The logical extreme.  
*Frontera*, Lewis Shiner. His first novel, about mission to Mars.  
*Look Into the Sun*, James Patrick Kelly. Interesting novel by peripheral cyberpunk.  
*Wildlife*, James Patrick Kelly. This highly bizarre short-story fixup novel is a catalog of cyberpunk ontological riffs.  
*Arachne*, Lisa Mason. Cyberspace robots vs drug-addict San Francisco lawyer-careerists. Weirdest. Weirdest.  
*Snow Crash*, Neal Stephenson. Fine example of second-generation cyberpunk by Seattle hacker.  
*The Diamond Age*, Neal Stephenson. This guy may be the first native-born cyberpunk writer.  
*Hardwired*, Walter Jon Williams. His most successful effort.  
*Spacetime Donuts* and *White Light*, Rudy Rucker. His early novels. Brilliantly deranged.  
*Live Robots*, Rudy Rucker. Paperback double reissue of Rucker's novels *Software* and *Wetware*.  
*Hacker and the Ants*, Rudy Rucker. The indefatigable Rucker tackles artificial life issues.  
*Involution Ocean* and *The Artificial Kid*, Bruce Sterling. His first two novels. SF adventures.

*Heavy Weather*, Bruce Sterling. Cyberpunk eco-disaster novel. Sterling's darkest work.  
*Holy Fire*, Bruce Sterling. The European art scene in the late 21st century.  
*Semiotext(e) SF*, Rudy Rucker, Peter Lamborn Wilson, Robert Anton Wilson, eds. Story anthology of bad craziness. Quite likely to cause protests from scandalized parents and censors.

## MAGAZINES AND CRITICISM

*Mondo 2000*. "Cyberpunk" as glossy West Coast fashion magazine. It Had To Happen.  
*boING boING*. Ultra-happening cyberslacker antizine from the heart of digitized desktop bohemia.  
*Asimov's Science Fiction*. Least reactionary of the standard American SF magazines.  
*Interzone*. Foremost British SF magazine. Libraries should carry this worthy zine as a public service, since individual US subscriptions are costly.  
*Science Fiction Eye*. More-or-less official lit-crit organ of cyberpunk SF and assorted fellow-travellers. Very sporadic.  
*Science Fiction Studies*. Dull gray academic rag seized in startling coup by wacky post-modernists. Now almost readable!  
*Wired*. The first magazine of the 1990s that actually looks and acts as if it belongs in this decade. Now in its fourth year!  
*21\*C*. Australian cyberculture weighs in with a big glossy artzine. Non-Fiction, Critical Studies.  
*Storming the Reality Studio*, Larry McCaffery, ed. Cyberpunk's man-in-academe gives his highly postmodern take on matters in this bug-crusher anthology.  
*Cyberpunk: Outlaws and Hackers on the Computer Frontier*, Katie Hafner and John Markoff. The best book to date on the outlaw "computer underground."  
*Across the Wounded Galaxy*, Larry McCaffery, ed. McCaffery interviews various weirdo leading-lights of po-mo SF, including Gibson and Sterling.  
*The Hacker Crackdown, Law and Disorder on the Electronic Frontier*, Bruce Sterling. It's not just for breakfast any more.  
*Terminal Identity*, Scott Bukatman. Headlong foray across the wild terrain of postmodern technology theory.



- The Happy Mutant Handbook*, Mark Frauenfelder, Carla Sinclair, Gareth Branwyn, Will Kreth, eds. The first Boing Boing book. More weird fun per micron than normals will ever imagine.
- Escape Velocity*, Mark Dery. Cyberculture: threat or menace? Round up the usual suspects: Stelarc, Moravec, Pauline, Sirius, Mu, Frauenfelder, Haraway, Orlan, Cronenberg, Dibell, Reznor, Leary, Lanier, Laurel, Barlow, Sobchack, Ross, Milhon, Kelly, Gibson, Cadigan, Shirley, etc etc—Good Lord, there's just no end to them.

### NOTE

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