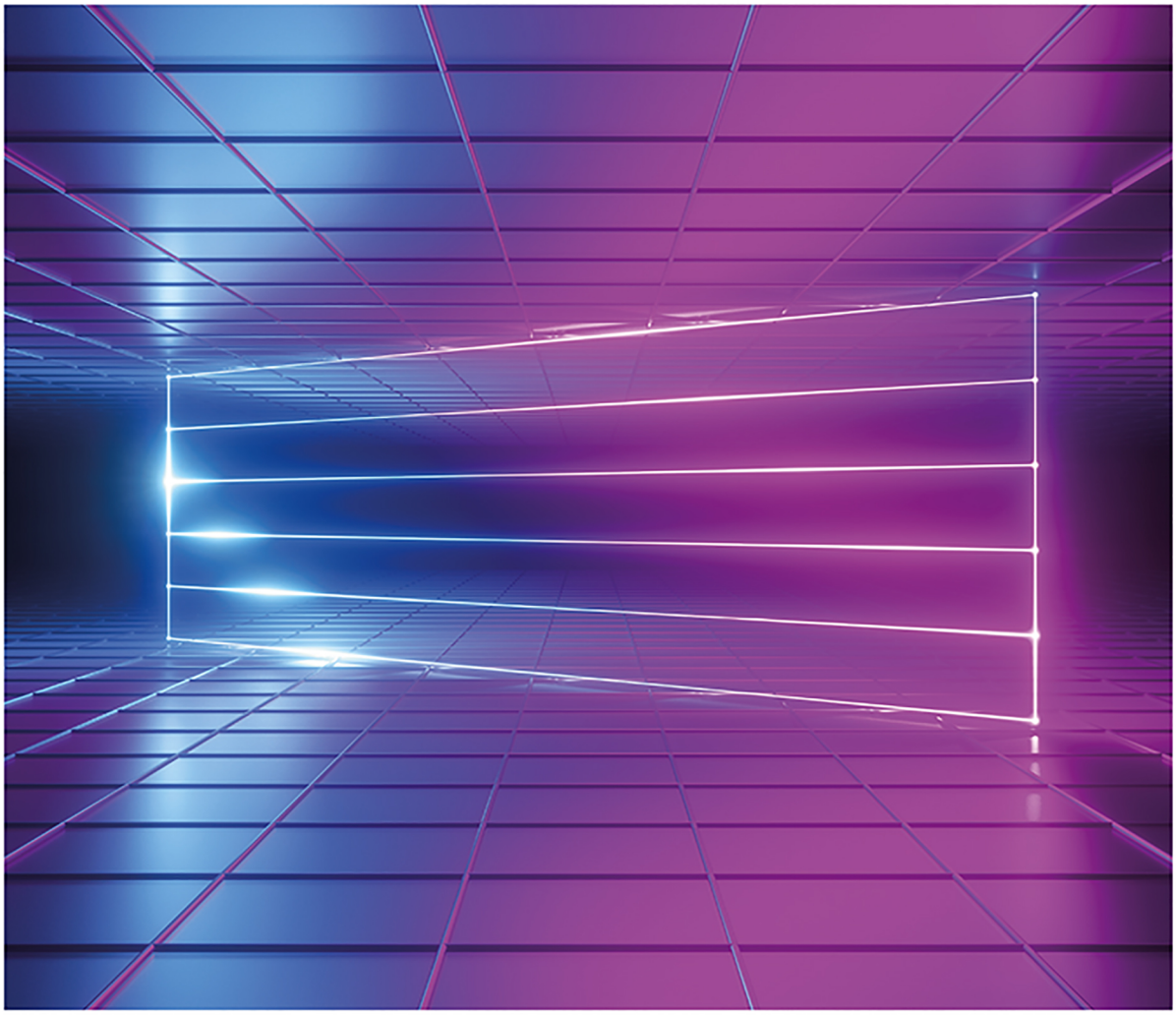
The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture



Edited by Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy, and Lars Schmeink

THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO CYBERPUNK CULTURE

In this companion, an international range of contributors examine the cultural formation of cyberpunk from micro-level analyses of example texts to macro-level debates of movements, providing readers with snapshots of cyberpunk culture and also cyberpunk as culture.

With technology seamlessly integrated into our lives and our selves, and social systems veering toward globalization and corporatization, cyberpunk has become a ubiquitous cultural formation that dominates our twenty-first century techno-digital landscapes. *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture* traces cyberpunk through its historical developments as a literary science fiction form to its spread into other media such as comics, film, television, and video games. Moreover, seeing cyberpunk as a general cultural practice, the *Companion* provides insights into photography, music, fashion, and activism. Cyberpunk, as the chapters presented here argue, is integrated with other critical theoretical tenets of our times, such as posthumanism, the Anthropocene, animality, and empire. And lastly, cyberpunk is a vehicle that lends itself to the rise of new futurisms, occupying a variety of positions in our regionally diverse reality and thus linking, as much as differentiating, our perspectives on a globalized technoscientific world.

With original entries that engage cyberpunk's diverse 'angles' and its proliferation in our life worlds, this critical reference will be of significant interest to humanities students and scholars of media, cultural studies, literature, and beyond.

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To Rory
AM

To Jennifer and Declan
love you most, plus one
GJM

To the world
for not disappointing in becoming ever more cyberpunk…
LS

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1

CYBERPUNK AS CULTURAL FORMATION

Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy, and Lars Schmeink

In his book *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay argues that today's social, political, and cultural realities have become science-fictional, that estrangement and dislocation constitute our habitual normalcy in the 21st century. Therefore, in order to process the "incongruous moments of technology's intersection with everyday life" (2), Csicsery-Ronay claims we need to draw upon the imaginaries of science fiction (sf) to make sense of quotidian realities that are saturated with such sf concepts as cloud computing, nanotechnology, genetic engineering, wearable technologies, and the increased proliferation of cyborgs in all shapes and sizes, to name only a few science-fictional tropes. But as writer and game designer Kyle Marquis reminded us in a much-circulated tweet in 2013, "unless you're over 60, you weren't promised flying cars. You were promised an oppressive cyberpunk dystopia. Here you go." At the heart of Marquis's claim is the realization that today's reality is not sf in the Golden Age sense of the 1940s and 1950s but rather as depicted by cyberpunk, that immensely popular form of 1980s sf which continues to speak to our contemporary moment. One does not have to see all aspects of cyberpunk as dystopian, as Marquis suggests, but one can hardly find fault in generally comparing the cyberpunk imaginary with today's quotidian reality.

While the term 'cyberpunk' may have originated in Bruce Bethke's "Cyberpunk" (1983) and was then applied to a variety of literary and cinematic texts that were alternately celebrated (often by cyberpunk practitioners) as energizing sf or derided and dismissed by critics as a marketing exercise that quickly ran its course, cyberpunk has had effects far beyond the small group of writers initially identified as the 'Movement,' rebranded by Gardner Dozois as 'cyberpunks,' and then codified by Bruce Sterling in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* (1986). While those beyond the sf community might not have even heard of cyberpunk, they will likely be aware of cyberpunk's impact: Consider the imagery made famous by Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), imagery replicated time and time again in cinema, animation, and photography; or the concept of 'cyberspace' coined in William Gibson's "Burning Chrome" (1983) and then popularized in his quintessential novel *Neuromancer* (1984), influencing how computer programmers and engineers envisioned a burgeoning digital realm that today we largely take for granted; or Walt Disney's *TRON* (Lisberger 1982), a financial failure that still drew Generation X-ers to their local arcades with fistfuls of quarters to play the titular video game that envisioned cyberspatial worlds as "untethered from real-world signs and signifiers," a visual modality that "has had a strong influence upon depictions of cyberspace," notably in video games (Johnson 139); and finally, the green digital rain of *The Matrix* (Wachowskis 1999) that has become visually synonymous with the control of 'reality' by technological systems. Cyberpunk is *everywhere*, even if its earliest practitioners have moved into other conceptual territories.

In this vein, the originating premise of this *Routledge Companion* can be found in a very simple, yet far-reaching claim by Thomas Foster—namely, that cyberpunk, a term first used as a literary concept to name a narrow branch of sf, has become a "cultural formation [which is] a historical articulation of textual practices" (xv) that now shapes the way we see our place in the world, and this *Companion* aims to track cyberpunk's diversity and far-reaching influence. We have organized our global contributors into three interconnected sections with which to apprehend this expansive subject matter. In *Cultural Texts*, we open the collection with a traditional focus on cyberpunk's literary and cinematic roots, ranging from the precursor texts that lay the foundation for cyberpunk to what we may call first-wave or Movement-era cyberpunk, a period that produced the cultural understanding of what constitutes a cyberpunk text across media. As *Cultural Texts* exemplifies, however, cyberpunk is also a visual and aural phenomenon and our contributors leave no stone unturned as they explore cyberpunk's influence in American comic books, Japanese manga and anime, video games, tabletop role-playing games, music, and even fashion. Interspersed with these analyses are 'case study' chapters that provide a narrowly focused analysis of a representative cyberpunk text, although as editors, we both invited and encouraged our contributors to write chapters on lesser-theorized works; therefore, you won't find 'case study' chapters on *Neuromancer*, or *Blade Runner*, or *Transmetropolitan* (1997–2002), or many of the other 'usual suspects' one might expect to find that have been the subject of other academic work; instead, our 'case study' chapters offer explorations into the oft-overlooked, kipple-cluttered corners of cyberpunk that hopefully expand the parameters of critical inquiry while also providing readers access ports to works they may have otherwise overlooked. Overall, *Cultural Texts* shows that cyberpunk is truly cross-cultural and offers a plenitude of ways with which to grapple with the technological landscape we occupy.

Part of better understanding our technological landscape is through the application of critical theory, and the chapters in *Cultural Theory* provide a variety of access ports to a better understanding of how cyberpunk is instrumental to decoding the complexities of our technocultural age. After all, cyberpunk's emergence coincided with the popularization of postmodernism, and it was indelibly linked to postmodernity the moment Fredric Jameson famously remarked in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* that cyberpunk is "the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself" (419); in particular, Jameson sees in cyberpunk "as much an expression of transnational corporate realities as it is of global paranoia" and singles out Gibson as "an exceptional literary realization within a predominantly visual or aural postmodern production" (38). Cyberpunk therefore occupied a privileged position in the academy as scholars and critical theorists of all stripes hurried to embrace an initially literary form that spoke so much to the diversity of our cultural and critical moment(s). Cyberpunk has continued to appeal to theorists as it spread into the mainstream and beyond, particularly through its engagement with key contemporary questions such as the role of humanism, the emergence of the posthuman, and the importance of the animal. As the chapters in *Cultural Theory* demonstrate, the centrality of identity in this human-to-posthuman movement has led to the adoption and subversion of cyberpunk by groups interrogating the future of identity from feminist, queer, Indigenous, and Afrofuturist perspectives, as well as broader cultural interrogations of (sur)veillance and cultural activism, all of which are explored here alongside the political interventions made by cyberpunk media into academic debates surrounding class, ecology, and empire.

Cyberpunk is often erroneously thought of largely as an Anglo-American mode, one that has a tendency of appropriating other cultural tropes and imagery (particularly from Japan) as window dressing for its narrative goals. The chapters in *Cultural Locales*, the final section in this *Companion*, show that cyberpunk may have started out as a U.S. phenomenon (or U.S.-Canadian, given Gibson's primary residence in Vancouver), but it quickly penetrated a number of geographical locales. *Cultural Locales* focuses on some of the other cultures that have had their own cyberpunk moments—some influenced by the North American wave of cyberpunk, others reacting

in specific regional ways to the global networks that increasingly define human relationships and the flow of capital between and beyond nation states. Mapping cyberpunk's territories outside of North America brings into focus the importance of a cultural mode such as this, one that allows the expression of the complex systems that govern 21st-century societies and lives. Of course, it isn't possible to showcase cyberpunk's cultural presence in every country. Nevertheless, *Cultural Locales* offers a significant sampling of how cyberpunk saturated and adapted itself to diverse cultural localities in alternately familiar, disorienting, and surprising ways that affirm cyberpunk as a global phenomenon.

Finally, editing a collection with nearly fifty contributors poses its own unique set of challenges, not the least of which was considering ways in which our formatting decisions might reflect the wider goals of the collection. We took the decolonizing move of replacing the traditionally capitalized 'the West' or 'Western' with the lowercase 'west' or 'western'; Marxism has been rendered as the lower-case 'marxism' to reflect that the field has moved well beyond the theories of Marx himself and therefore past the need for proper noun capitalization; we also avoid nearly all use of the words 'genre' or 'subgenre' to refer to cyberpunk, instead taking a cue from Foster and Rosemary Jackson in opting for the terminology of "mode," Jackson explaining it as a better term "to identify structural features underlying various works in different periods of time" (qtd. in Broderick 42). And, finally, we made editorial interventions into our contributors' papers to foster internal connections among the various chapters rather than allowing the chapters to simply exist as discrete entries, although we are certain more connections can be made. As editors, we also want to take this moment to thank our wonderful contributors who were diligent in working with us from their first drafts to the final products and returning their revisions in an expedient manner, even if word count sometimes proved to be an obstacle, which is a roundabout way of acknowledging we perhaps bear a fair share (if not the brunt) of responsibility for any perceived oversights or weaknesses in individual chapters. Hopefully, readers will agree that this collection has a symmetry or internal scaffolding that is difficult to achieve in collections of this nature, and the sinews of that symmetry undoubtedly rest with our contributors. We also gratefully acknowledge the assistance of both Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint who offered their respective insights at particularly thorny moments when a fresh set of eyes was desperately needed; they are silent partners in this project. Finally, Edward James has proven invaluable for taking on the arduous task of assembling the index and we are thankful beyond words for his help in relieving our workload.

In the end, the purpose of *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture* has always been to emphasize the importance of cyberpunk as a cultural formation, a means of engaging with our 21st-century technocultural age. Through these chapters, we have attempted to trace cyberpunk's explosion from its origins to some of the diverse ways the mode shapes our understanding of 21st-century life, wherever we are on the globe. We hope that this collection will invite scholars to consider that cyberpunk remains alive and relevant because it is our quotidian reality.

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I

Cultural Texts

2
LITERARY PRECURSORS

Rob Latham

Avant-garde movements often present themselves as radically original and completely unbeholden to tradition, but this impudence is, of course, a pose. In the field of popular fiction especially, there is no such thing as radical originality: the mere fact of belonging to a genre implies some common set of aesthetic features shared with other works similarly shelved. The history of American science fiction (sf) has been marked by the cyclical emergence of new movements that claim to break sharply with their predecessors, starting with John W. Campbell, Jr.'s promotion of a streamlined, disciplined hard sf by contrast with the pulpy excesses of 1930s superscience. Yet even during the so-called "Golden Age" of *Astounding Stories*, familiar formulas persisted: Asimov's "Foundation" series is basically a more rigorously intellectual version of space opera, while his robot stories are soberer, less hysterical treatments of the stock theme of the menacing machine. Even the most revolutionary avant-garde in sf history, the New Wave of the 1960s and 1970s, retained significant aspects of the previous decade's work, such as an emphasis on dystopian futures and satirical critiques of technocracy à la Frederik Pohl, C.M. Kornbluth, Philip K. Dick, and Robert Sheckley. This is not to say that innovation never truly occurs but merely that it tends to involve adaptation and modification rather than wholesale replacement, nimbly updating time-honored tropes in light of fresh technosocial developments.

The same is true of the cyberpunks. While Bruce Sterling's Preface to *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* (1986), one of the premier manifestoes of the movement, claims that an "allegiance to Eighties culture has marked [… the] group" (ix), the key themes he highlights—the increasing cyborgization of experience, the fusion of high-tech and subculture, rampant globalization—had in fact been explored in the previous decades by writers as diverse as J.G. Ballard, D.G. Compton, and John Brunner. Indeed, cyberpunk inherited from the New Wave a fascination with corporate mass-mediatization and "global integration" (Sterling xiv) derived from the critical and creative work of William S. Burroughs, Marshall McLuhan, and Thomas Pynchon, who had equally inspired writers of the previous generation. Most significantly, cyberpunk reverted to the hard-edged near-future orientation of much 1960s and 1970s sf, marking a sharp contrast with the dreamy textures and tones of contemporaneous science fantasy, such as Robert Silverberg's Majipoor trilogy (1980–83), Joan Vinge's Snow Queen series (1980–91), or Gene Wolfe's *Book of the New Sun* (1980–84).

Again, this is not to deny the movement's inventiveness but merely to indicate that its cutting edge was honed, in significant part, by the bold work of its precursors. In his *Mirrorshades* Preface, Sterling credits a few of these forerunners—Samuel R. Delany, Norman Spinrad, and John Varley—with having helped form the cyberpunk ethos, while at the same time paradoxically

proclaiming the movement to be *sui generis*, an unprecedented eruption from the 1980s tech underground. Some New Wave authors have sought to correct this one-sided record: Spinrad's lengthy anatomy of the "Neuromantics" (his preferred term for the movement), which warmly praised the fictions of Sterling, William Gibson, and John Shirley, also pointed out their unreckoned debts to Michael Moorcock, Harlan Ellison, and himself, while Delany traced Gibson's lyrical evocations of cyberspace to Roger Zelazny's early short stories and his depiction of female characters to the 1970s work of Joanna Russ, tartly commenting that perhaps the author was constitutionally "blind to any mention" of such correspondences (qtd. in Tatsumi 6).

Some of the academic champions of cyberpunk have been equally oblivious, contrasting the movement's subcultural energy, its vision of posthuman possibility, and its hard technological edge with the 1960s New Wave, which they dismissively characterize as formalist, humanistic, and technophobic. Fred Pfeil, for instance, defines the New Wave as a narrowly aesthetic phenomenon, obsessed with "autotelic language practices, experimental forms, and […] inadequately motivated but luxuriant image play," by comparison with cyberpunk, which shifted the genre "from formal and aesthetic experimentation back to experiments in social thought" (85–86). Explicitly building on this argument, Scott Bukatman has claimed that cyberpunk "returned the experimental wing of the genre to its technocratic roots," rejecting the New Wave's defense of inner space in favor of an exploration of "the transformation of quotidian existence by a proliferating set of global electronic technologies" (140). Ironically, these arguments, while expressing a clear anxiety of influence regarding the New Wave's literary legacy, nonetheless root cyberpunk deeply in previous traditions of sf writing.

The pat opposition articulated by Pfeil and Bukatman tends not only to ignore the sociopolitical engagement of the New Wave's major writers but also to exaggerate the path-breaking qualities of the cyberpunk movement. These were, as noted, often extrapolated from New Wave precursors: the media-based obsessions of Ballard and Spinrad, the wise-cracking hipness of Ellison, Delany's wild explorations of the underground, and the cynical anti-technocratic posture of Thomas M. Disch and John Sladek, among many other influences. Even the movement's handling of relatively fresh topics—in particular, the explosion of digital culture and its associated interfaces, and the radical refashioning of social life and embodied experience this explosion portended—stirred echoes from previous sf going back at least as far as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and other classic midcentury dystopias of social engineering.

In fact, four key cyberpunk themes were foreshadowed in specific works of the New Wave era: (1) the emergence of an information economy, with all its complex impact on the social order, in particular the spread of cybercrime and forms of info-warfare; (2) the resultant hypercommodification of culture and the attendant growth in cyborgized lifestyles; (3) the proliferation of synthetic realities, to the point that simulated experience has begun to supplant the real thing; and (4) the possibility of a transhumanist "uploading" of consciousness, allowing individuals to abandon the mortal "meat" in favor of a virtual existence as discorporate data. All of these themes are perceived as quintessentially cyberpunk, yet all were powerfully prefigured—indeed, basically crystallized—in important sf works of the 1960s and 1970s.

2.1 Running the Net: John Brunner's *The Shockwave Rider*

Prior to the invention of the microchip in the 1960s, computers in sf were generally depicted as colossal, monolithic machines, vastly powerful but also simply *vast*. A rare exception was Murray Leinster's "A Logic Named Joe" (1946), which imagined desktop gadgets, complete with monitors and keyboards, that process information via an interlinked network—an astonishing prefiguration of the world we now inhabit. In Leinster's story, these devices—called "logics"—wind up promoting social anarchy by disseminating information that facilitates all manner of crimes and

lawlessness. Though the tale is brief and a bit of a sport, it stands as one of the earliest depictions of a networked society, in which information is at once a profitable commodity and a potential weapon. The full-fledged portrayal of such a cybernetic world in sf would have to wait several decades, after pioneering innovations in semiconductor design and data transfer made possible both the Internet and the portable computer. One of the most compelling early attempts to explore the psychosocial consequences of these developments was John Brunner's *The Shockwave Rider* (1975).

Brunner's text powerfully prefigures the world that cyberpunk would soon come to popularize: a dystopian near-future dominated by sinister corporations and criminal cabals, in which curtailments of individual freedom have been compensated by a proliferation of consumer technologies and lifestyle options. Distributed "desk computers" are linked to an "integrated data-net"—a cyberspatial web that, in principle, democratizes access to information but which, in practice, merely reinforces prevailing inequities. And the hero, Nick Haflinger, is a proto-hacker adept at "running the net"—i.e., using his programming skills to fabricate fake identities that allow him to stay one step ahead of his enemies. As he explains, "it's a talent, like a musician's, or a poet's. I can play a computer read-in literally for hours at a time and never hit a wrong note" (253). The forerunner of such hacker anti-heroes as Gibson's Case or Johnny Mnemonic, Nick "was like a rat, skulking in the walls of modern society. The moment he showed his nose, the exterminators would be called for" (26).

Two of the main influences on Brunner's depiction of the emergent contours of information society would also be key to the development of cyberpunk: the so-called "hacker ethic," in particular the principle that "information wants to be free" (Brand 202), and the prognostications of noted futurist Alvin Toffler. Brunner's hacker anti-hero, an info-saboteur remorselessly pursued by governmental and corporate authorities, gets his revenge and ensures his own liberty by unleashing "the father and mother of all tapeworms" into the data-net (249). This program provides access to information previously classified or otherwise quarantined—specifically, data relating to issues of "public health, the protection of the environment, [and] bribery and corruption" by business leaders and elected officials (250). "As of today," Nick opines, "whatever you want to know…you can now know. In other words, *there are no more secrets*" (248; emphasis in original). A significant difference between this depiction of data piracy and later treatments of the theme in Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and Bruce Sterling's *Islands in the Net* (1988) is that, in *Shockwave Rider*, the hack that "frees" the information is motivated by a utopian concern for the public good, rather than a desire for individual profit or factional advantage. To put the matter another way, it is probably fair to say that the ethico-political perspectives of cyberpunk tend to be slightly more cynical than those of their New Wave precursors.

This is true even when those perspectives derive from the same source material—in this case, Toffler's predictions of the rise of "super-industrial" or "Third-Wave" society in *Future Shock* (1970). Brunner's novel includes an acknowledgment of the influence of "Toffler's stimulating study *Future Shock*" on his own extrapolations (n.p.), and his title features a nod to that best-selling book. The novel's characters, besieged by new technological developments and a rapidly expanding data sphere, periodically succumb to "overload," retreating into a catatonic stupor in the face of this overwhelming bombardment of novelty. Technosocial change, in short, had "accelerate[d] until it approximated the limit of what human beings can endure" (124). The idea comes directly from *Future Shock*, which argues that the pace of change in modern information society "radically alters the balance between novel and familiar situations," forcing individuals "not merely to cope with a faster flow, but with more and more situations to which previous personal experience does not apply" (34). Toffler's subsequent study *The Third Wave* (1980) further expanded this diagnosis of the psychosocial fallout of rapid-fire change and the consequent breakdown of settled routine and reliable authority. According to Sterling, *The Third Wave* became "a bible to many cyberpunks" in its vision of a "technical revolution […] based not in hierarchy but in decentralization,

not in rigidity but in fluidity" (xii). Yet, a decade before cyberpunk, Brunner had already mined Toffler's prophecies to depict an information-driven world where rigid hierarchies are under threat from savvy hackers who use their know-how to decrypt and disseminate subversive knowledge.

2.2 Cinderella Transistorized: James Tiptree, Jr.'s "The Girl Who Was Plugged In"

While Brunner's novel gestures at the sort of popular culture an information society would be likely to promote, including online gaming and gambling, other New Wave-era texts have drawn out more fully the possibilities of interactive media in ways that prefigured cyberpunk technologies. Prototypical virtual reality technologies, for example, had been depicted in sf since at least the 1950s, in stories like John D. MacDonald's "Spectator Sport" (1950), Ray Bradbury's "The Veldt" (1950), and James E. Gunn's "Name Your Pleasure" (1955). These texts project immersive forms of artificial experience vended by global corporations with names like World Senseways (MacDonald) or Hedonics, Inc. (Gunn), thus prefiguring cyberpunk's emphasis on the capitalist commodification of human sensory and cognitive functions. During the 1960s, the theories of Marshall McLuhan, which argued for mass media as a kind of perceptual prosthesis into which the audience was collectively plugged, influenced a number of New Wave texts featuring interactive forms of television, such as Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron*, Compton's *Synthajoy*, and Kate Wilhelm's "Baby, You Were Great" (all 1968). In Compton's and Wilhelm's stories, the audience has direct access to the emotional states of performers via new recording technologies, a set-up further extrapolated in "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" (1973) by James Tiptree, Jr. (a.k.a. Alice Sheldon).

Tiptree, Jr.'s story, which won the 1974 Hugo Award for Best Novella, remarkably foreshadows several core aspects of cyberpunk. It is set in a globalized, corporate-dominated near-future where control of data transfer is the main mechanism of social power and cultural authority. Yet every effort the central firm—called, simply, "Global Transmissions Corporation"—makes to commoditize and monopolize data has unintended consequences: "Their nightmares are about hemorrhages of information: channels screwed up, plans misimplemented, garble creeping in. Their gigantic wealth only worries them" (82). As in Gibson's *Neuromancer*, John Shirley's Eclipse trilogy (1985–90), and other key cyberpunk texts, the narrative action persistently shifts between shadowy centers of power and street-level concerns, the connection between them cemented via wetware technology that permits a lowly urchin named P. Burke to remotely inhabit and control a robot celebrity called Delphi. By means of "electrode jacks peeping out of her sparse hair, and […] other meldings of flesh and metal" (84), P. Burke lives out a vicarious fantasy of jet-setting romance, in the process unwittingly touting the luxurious commodities with which the company outfits Delphi's extravagant lifestyle. The empowerment offered consumers by cyborgized mass media, however, is a sham and a delusion, an opportunity to wallow in ersatz pleasures while being capitalistically exploited; as Tiptree, Jr.'s wisecracking narrator comments: "You thought this was Cinderella transistorized?" (84).

The fabrication and exploitation of synthetic celebrities, a key theme in cyberpunk texts ranging from Pat Cadigan's "Pretty Boy Crossover" (1986) to Gibson's *Idoru* (1996) to Richard Calder's *Cythera* (1998), finds powerful expression in Tiptree, Jr.'s story (as in other major works of New Wave sf, such as Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* [1970] or Compton's *The Unsleeping Eye* [1973]). Delphi is "the darlingest girl child you've EVER seen" (85), a mass-mediated angel living a hedonistic life of "[p]arties—clothes—suncars!" (90) while being invisibly puppeteered by P. Burke, "a gaunt she-golem flab-naked and spouting wires" (118). The fusion between them—constituting "a fantastic cybersystem," which the company refers to simply as "the investment" (115)—permits unprecedented commercial profiteering; as the narrator remarks, after listing the various products Burke/Delphi promotes and popularizes, "you can see why it's economic to have a few

controllable gods" (95). And the company has big plans for their cyborg heroine, which they view as nothing more than a commodity: "she's scheduled for at least two decades' product life" (97), moving from a "limited consumer market" into "mass-pop potential" (99).

As in cyberpunk treatments of this theme, Tiptree, Jr. exposes, with a satire that is at once poignant and scathing, the crucial gap between the gaudy promises of virtual life and the sorry realities of meat-bound existence. In a pathological "self-alienation" (96), the more P. Burke identifies with the glamorous Delphi, the less concern she has for her own mortal shell: "She isn't eating or sleeping, they can't keep her out of the body-cabinet to get her blood moving, there are necroses under her grisly sit-down" (97). But Tiptree, Jr. makes clear, as many cyberpunk authors fail to do, the gendered dimensions of this sort of virtual life, the way it might appeal in particular to young women seeking to escape their imagined deficiencies into a cosmetic fantasy of perfected femininity. "One look at Delphi and the viewers know: DREAMS CAN COME TRUE" (98)—in short, romance with no threat of rejection and none of the messy realities of embodied sexuality, since for the 17-year-old P. Burke "sex is a four-letter word spelled P-A-I-N" (93). As the narrator tartly comments, "[y]ou could write the script yourself" (92)—hence, the repeated invocations of the gender (and class) dynamics of popular fairy tales like "Cinderella" and "The Ugly Duckling." No matter how high tech the set-up, the bottom line, as in so many works of cyberpunk, is just the same old cruel exploitation.

2.3 The Electronic Veil: Daniel F. Galouye's *Simulacron-3*

Granting the basic premise that animates stories such as Tiptree, Jr.'s—that it is technically possible to "jack in" to an alternative sensorium and enjoy vicarious experiences as convincing as the real thing—it is only a short step to the more radical notion of completely supplanting everyday reality with a synthetic duplicate. Such a solipsistic fantasy—or nightmare—is hardly new, going back at least to Descartes's speculation, in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), that what we take to be our perceptual environment might actually be a skillful fake manipulated by an evil demon. Major sf stories of the 1950s and 1960s developed this idea into unnerving scenarios involving characters who come to suspect—or suddenly realize—that they are immured in false realities. Several of these tales took their inspiration from the subtle forms of psychological control exercised by postwar advertising and political ideology: in Pohl's "Tunnel Under the World" (1955), the protagonist discovers that his suburban neighborhood is actually a miniaturized simulation designed by marketing executives to promote their products, while Dick's *Eye in the Sky* (1957) propels several characters into delusory universes pervaded and controlled by various political and religious dogmas. Such stories prefigure cyberpunk takes on virtual reality, such as the scenes in *Neuromancer* where Case, through the agency of a conniving artificial intelligence, is imprisoned in a cyberspatial dreamland with his dead lover, not to mention cyberpunk-inflected films such as *Dark City* (Proyas 1998), *The Matrix* (Wachowskis 1999), and *The Thirteenth Floor* (Rusnak 1999).

The Thirteenth Floor was based on one of the most effective treatments of the theme in 1960s and 1970s sf: Daniel F. Galouye's 1964 novel *Simulacron-3* (a.k.a. *Counterfeit World*; also filmed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder in 1973 as *World on a Wire*[1]). Once again, the pernicious influence of advertising is predominant: a major marketing firm develops, via the science of "simulectronics," a "total environment simulator" for purposes of marketing research; this simulator contains an entire virtual city populated by test subjects unaware that they are computer constructs—forms of "counterfeit life" made up of "memory drums," "synaptic relays," and "cognitive circuits" (33)—who are being exploited for information about commercial products and trends. These "reaction entities" are indistinguishable from "real, living, thinking personalities," "never suspecting that their past experiences were synthetic, that their universe wasn't a good, solid, firm, materialistic one" (24). Transit between real and simulated worlds is achieved via a technique of "empathic

coupling" (36)—i.e., establishing a connection between worlds that allows the user to link with the simulated reaction entity and control it accordingly. This coupling, on the one hand, permits the protagonist (a research scientist) to monitor his company's investment directly but, on the other hand, potentially allows a rebellious reaction entity to escape its simulation into the wider world.

The complexity of Galouye's novel—what makes it more than an extended version of Pohl's "Tunnel Under the World"—derives from this crossover traffic between macrocosm and microcosm. The effect is similar to the narrative portage between real and virtual worlds characteristic of cyberpunk, though *Simulacron-3* suggests a more radically destabilizing confusion of worlds than Gibson et al. usually entertain. Not only can entities pass into and out of the simulator, but the very possibility of such passage renders reality itself ontologically suspect. Through disturbing ruptures and fissures in his perceptual environment, the protagonist comes to apprehend that the world he takes for real is no more durable than the simulacrum he ostensibly shepherds. As with Descartes's speculative cosmology, the novel projects the possibility of a sadistic "Operator" in some "Higher Existence" stage-managing the protagonist's experience:

> I found myself looking into the star-spangled sky, trying to see through the universal illusion into absolute reality. But then, that Real World was in no *physical* direction from my own. It was not in my universe, nor I in Its. At the same time, though, it was everywhere around me, hidden by an electronic veil. (111; emphasis in original)

While the novel ultimately resolves this dilemma by locating the protagonist in a stable realm, this conclusion is less resonant finally than the atmosphere of paranoiac doubt and existential ambiguity that otherwise dominates the narrative.

In its uneasy conflation of reality and illusion, *Simulacron-3* is a much more metaphysical, if not metafictional, text than works of classic cyberpunk, more aligned with the abstract enigmas of Borges or the counterfeit mindscapes of Dick (e.g., *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* [1965], "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale" [1966]). This is not to say that cyberpunk authors scant philosophical inquiry but rather that they tend to be too cynically hard-headed to worry themselves over transcendental reveries of universal delusion. Gibson's Case grasps at once that he has been incarcerated in a simulation and, though tempted by the randy ghost of Linda Lee, opts fairly promptly for the disappointments of the real by contrast with the blandishments of the virtual—a resolution echoed in the decision by the protagonist of Cadigan's "Pretty Boy Crossover" to refuse an offer of digital immortality. To put the matter another way, cyberpunk can more or less comfortably incorporate a range of simulated experiences into consensus reality without threatening that reality with fatal depletion, as so many texts of the New Wave era tend to do.

2.4 "A Portfolio of Personae": Robert Silverberg's *To Live Again*

The mirror image of the virtual-world story in sf is the tale of uploaded consciousness, in which an individual psyche is mechanically recorded and decanted into a computer, thus liberating the self from the constraints of the flesh and affording it an electronic immortality. Promoted by fringe-science thinkers like Ray Kurzweil and Hans Moravec, this "extropian" fantasy of radical self-improvement via technology had a significant impact on the development of cyberpunk: In Rudy Rucker's *Software* (1982), for example, a character has the contents of his brain transferred into a robotic body, while several works of Greg Egan—e.g., *Permutation City* (1994) and *Diaspora* (1997)—extrapolate the philosophical and socioeconomic implications of "copying" the mind. Once again, though, this theme was not new in sf: Arthur C. Clarke's 1955

novel *The City and the Stars* is set in a far future where individual selves, stored on a mainframe computer, are periodically revivified, while in Jerry Sohl's *The Altered Ego* (1954), people's memories are periodically recorded as a kind of "backup," a scenario that was developed further by John Varley in a number of stories, such as "The Phantom of Kansas" and "Overdrawn at the Memory Bank" (both 1976), wherein stored memories are re-embodied in clones upon the death of their original incarnation.

Robert Silverberg's *To Live Again* (1969) depicts a similar set-up, though in his treatment, these archived personalities can be bought and sold like commodities. In Silverberg's novel, wealthy individuals, using a technique called the "Scheffing process," periodically preserve their memories on magnetic tape; after their deaths, these personality profiles are "transplanted" into the minds of other wealthy subjects, thus permitting a kind of parasitic immortality: "jacked into the nervous system of its host," the revived spirit "could perceive and respond as if literally reincarnated" (76). The process is not within the means of mere "plebs," and Silverberg makes much of the social implications of this class distinction. Indeed, the characters' attitudes toward acquiring transplanted personae bespeak a cynical arrogance of status and power: scheming businessmen diversify their psychic "portfolio[s]" in order to maximize their socioeconomic advantage (9), while jet-setting socialites blithely add new souls to their repertoire for the voyeuristic thrill of vicarious experience. The entire process has been thoroughly commodified: Acquiring a new "carnate" involves "shopping" among alternatives stored in a vast "soul bank" (46, 12); if dissatisfied, the host can have the implanted persona erased, thus making it available again for another purchaser to enjoy.

Silverberg meticulously extrapolates the psychosocial fallout of such a system of serial reincarnation. While most characters manage to coexist with their transplanted carnates in a kind of psychic symbiosis, host minds ill-equipped for a potential battle of egos inside their own heads can find themselves shunted aside, their bodies hijacked by their riders. Moreover, since the Scheffing process is several generations old, the phenomenon of "secondary personae" has come to the fore: Carnates often come equipped with their own nested spirits, transplanted during their lives and now surviving amidst their recorded memories. "[T]hese crowded minds were […] being picked up by the recipients," creating "a babbling mob within the brain" (65). A religion of neo-Buddhism has arisen to explain this plethora of reborn souls, but it is a "Westernized version" (12) in which the ultimate goal is no longer to escape into the selfless oblivion of nirvana but for the ego to survive indefinitely. As one of the characters tartly comments: "We've borrowed this prayer-wheel garbage from the Himalayas, only we've turned it upside down, since in its original form it's inapplicable to our society…. [O]ur whole idea is to grab as many incarnations as possible, down through the centuries…. That's a perversion of Buddhism!" (64). In short, a thin veneer of New Age fantasy has been added to a purely secular, totally self-serving, "materialistic cult of rebirth" (16).

Silverberg's novel prefigures key themes in cyberpunk sf, in particular the notion of a systematic exploitation of uploading technology for commercial ends. In *Neuromancer*, for example, individuals can be reduced to "data constructs" maintained on CD-ROM, their technical skills owned and used by corporations. Similarly, Michael Swanwick's *Vacuum Flowers* (1987) depicts a world in which "wetware personae," recorded from the brains of the recently deceased, are mass-produced to supply expertise a consumer otherwise does not possess, while George Alec Effinger's *When Gravity Fails* (1986) features plug-in personality modules—called "moddies"—that permit individuals to incorporate the style and attitudes of their subjects. Just as bootleg moddies, sold on the black market, are used for criminal purposes in Effinger's novel, so Silverberg depicts the possibility of an illicit traffic in bartered souls. And Silverberg's notion that an ersatz non-western faith might arise to provide a popular rationalization of new uploading technologies is reflected in Gibson's recourse to voodoo in *Count Zero* (1986) or Neal Stephenson to Sumerian legends in *Snow Crash* (1992) to gloss specifically cybernetic forms of emergent spirituality.

2.5 Conclusion

In sum, and contra the claims of critics such as Pfeil and Bukatman, cyberpunk owes a significant debt to the New Wave era. As stories such as Brunner's, Tiptree, Jr.'s, Galouye's, and Silverberg's clearly show, sf of the 1960s and 1970s had already begun to develop a number of the major pillars of the cyberpunk worldview, from the conviction that information technologies would radically reshape global society to the belief that capitalist forms of commodification and control would inevitably channel this process toward profitable ends. The biotech assault on centered subjectivity mounted by classic cyberpunk was also powerfully prefigured in New Wave treatments of proto-VR technologies, with their ability to project artificial environments and thus shatter and remold the perceiving self. A careful comparison of key New Wave and cyberpunk texts is likely to elicit as many similarities as differences: Even the 1960s obsession with "inner space" is echoed in Gibson's famous evocation of cyberspace as a "consensual hallucination" (67), and the hard-boiled textures and tones of the 1980s were adumbrated in Tiptree, Jr.'s wise-cracking style and Silverberg's cynicism. Seeing the two movements as radically opposed—or, as I put it in a previous essay, "focus[ing] on rupture at the expense of continuity" (45)—thus ignores the ways in which the sf mode actually grows and evolves: not by breaking radically with what has gone before but by adapting and refashioning past achievements into new and compelling forms.

Note

1 For more on the influence of *World on a Wire* on cyberpunk, see Evan Torner's chapter on German Cyberpunk in this collection.

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3

THE *MIRRORSHADES* COLLECTIVE

Graham J. Murphy

Literary cyberpunk's emergence in the mid-1980s is often attributed to the convergence of a quintet of authors: William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Lewis Shiner, John Shirley, and Rudy Rucker, a cadre of like-minded writers harboring rebellious attitudes toward what they perceived as the inadequacies of science fiction (sf). The members of this quintet were first drawn to one another through a variety of seemingly chance encounters coupled with admiration for one another's work. For example, essayist and editor of *Science Fiction Eye* Steven P. Brown remarks that the 1974 Clarion Writers Workshop proved instrumental because Brown first met Bruce Sterling and introduced him to equal parts author and punk rocker John Shirley. Shirley, in turn, was instrumental to Gibson's career: The two men formed a fast friendship after a Vancouver convention, and Shirley helped convince Gibson to continue writing and sending out his early short stories for publication (Brown 175). At the same time, Sterling thought highly of Rudy Rucker's writing and started a correspondence with him which led to Worldcon/Constellation (1983) where Gibson, Sterling, and Shiner partied with Rucker to celebrate his latest novel *The Sex Sphere* (1983). Rucker had known of Gibson's work, having read "Johnny Mnemonic" (1981) in *Omni*, and was "awed by the writing. Gibson, too, was out to change SF" (204). Rucker was not alone in his estimation of Gibson's abilities; for example, Sterling would later describe Gibson's influence upon them for the documentary *No Maps for These Territories* (Neale 2000) in this fashion:

> When Lewis Shiner [whom Sterling met through the Turkey City Writer's Workshop] and I […] were first reading Gibson's work in manuscript, we looked at it and said "Look, this is breakthrough material. This guy is really doing something different. Like we gotta put down our preconceptions and pick up on this guy from Vancouver. It's the way forward." A hole had opened up in consensus reality and we just saw daylight.

As a result, the first half of the 1980s was an idyllic period for this cadre, highlighted by the publication of Shiner's *Frontera* (1984), the first volume of Shirley's *Eclipse* series (1985), Sterling's Shaper/Mechanist stories (1982–84) and *Schismatrix* (1985), and Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). As Brown recounts, all "these people fed and cross-fed each other, passing around manuscripts, hammering out a vision of modern SF that more accurately reflected the future of the real world" (174–75).

Equally important as the fiction to the fledgling Movement, however, was Sterling's self-produced fanzine *Cheap Truth*, which became a polemical vehicle to critique so-called staid sf and promote the alleged revolutionary fervor of a new generation of authors looking to shake up

the establishment and sell their stories. In the first two issues of *Cheap Truth*, circa 1983, Sterling, under his *nom de plume* 'Vincent Omniaveritas,' describes sf as both being stuck in a "reptilian torpor" (#1) and suffering from "intellectual exhaustion" (#2). Similarly, Lewis Shiner, writing as 'Sue Denim' in *Cheap Truth* #10 (1985), viewed *Neuromancer*'s Nebula Award nomination for Best Novel as a battle the upstart generation was determined to win:

> The voices of repression range from the senile babblings of Robert Heinlein to the California vapidity of Larry Niven to the moist-eyed urgency of Kim Stanley Robinson; arrayed against them are William Gibson, Lewis Shiner, and Jack Dann […]. For every Heinlein that smites a Gibson, thousands more will rise in his place. The SF revolution is crying out for literacy, imagination, and humanity; it needs only a victory in the Nebulas to shatter the giant's terracotta feet. Up against the wall, Heinlein! (#10)

Shiner and the rest of what was internally (and informally) being called the Movement witnessed the Nebula victory they longed for: Gibson's debut novel won not only the 1985 Nebula Award for Best Novel, but also the 1985 Hugo Award and the 1984 Philip K. Dick Award. With the beauty of hindsight, we can say Gibson's overwhelming success with *Neuromancer*, coupled with Sterling's, Shiner's, Shirley's, and Rucker's steady output, meant the Movement was destined to enter the mainstream.

The Movement authors' early successes, however, owe much to two influential editors: Ellen Datlow and Gardner Dozois. Mike Ashley provides a thorough account of Datlow's influence as fiction editor for *Omni* and explains that "[w]hat was typical about *Omni*'s science fiction was that it was unpredictable. It pushed boundaries, some of which readers had not even known were there. *Omni* became the pre-eminent market for those writers who were not traditional" (41). Datlow quickly became the "Queen of Punk SF" (Ashley 49), and under her leadership, *Omni*'s science fiction increasingly focused on humans interfacing with the very technologies that *Omni*'s nonfiction articles were popularizing. A few years later, Gardner Dozois wrote "Science Fiction in the Eighties" for *The Washington Post* (December 30, 1984) and (un)officially jettisoned 'Movement' in favor of the *cyberpunk* label:

> About the closest thing here to a self-willed esthetic 'school' would be the purveyors of bizarre hard-edged, high-tech stuff, who have on occasion been referred to as 'cyberpunks'—Sterling, Gibson, Shiner, [Pat] Cadigan, [Greg] Bear […] the similarities in goals and esthetics between them are much stronger and more noticeable than the (admittedly real) differences. For one thing, they are all ambitious writers, not satisfied to keep turning out the Same Old Stuff. Once again it is a time for literary risk-taking, and once again those who take them are admirable—and that makes it an exciting time for sf as a genre.

While Dozois certainly didn't coin the term *cyberpunk*—that honor goes to Bruce Bethke's "Cyberpunk" (1983)—he helped popularize a pulsing punk sensibility or "spirit of the new force in sf [that] was pervading the field" (Ashley 47) that had emerged since at least the start of the 1980s. For example, a panel devoted to 'punk sf' cropped up at Armadillo Con (1982) where Gibson read from his work-in-progress *Neuromancer*; John Kessel delivered a lecture in 1983 to North Carolina State University on the 'punk sf' of Gibson and Sterling; the year after *Neuromancer*'s publication, NASFiC (North American Science Fiction Convention) featured a panel with Sterling, Shiner, Shirley, Cadigan, and Bear, and Shirley again appeared on a cyberpunk panel (with Jack Williamson, Norman Spinrad, and Gregory Benford) at the Science Fiction Research Association's annual conference in 1985, a venue he would revisit the next year to deliver a paper "Cyberpunk or Cyberjunk?" (Heuser 231–34). These examples (among many) are testament

to cyberpunk's emergence as a potentially electrifying force in sf, and it is during this wave that Ace Books published Sterling's edited collection *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* (1986).

The *Mirrorshades* collection includes the original Movement-era cadre—Gibson, Sterling, Shirley, Shiner, and Rucker—as well as such allies as Cadigan and Bear and cyberpunk newcomers Tom Maddox, Marc Laidlaw, James Patrick Kelly, and Paul Di Filippo. *Mirrorshades*, however, is more than a collection of stories: It is also Sterling's attempt to map cyberpunk's contours and integrate competing sensibilities, and what emerges is a tension between a rebellious group of authors content to sneer at the mainstream from the margins and an increasingly popular(ized) movement that was slowly becoming the mainstream. The difficulties of trying to thread this needle between rebelliousness and respectability are plainly evident in Sterling's Preface that opens the collection. For example, Sterling is adamant at the very start of the Preface that "the 'typical cyberpunk writer' does not exist; this person is only a Platonic fiction. For the rest of us, our label is an uneasy bed of Procrustes, where fiendish critics wait to lop and stretch us" (ix). Indeed, a quick scan of the *Mirrorshades* stories is testament to Sterling's claim: The widely varied tales include militaristic artificial intelligences taking over their human hosts (Tom Maddox: "Snake-Eyes"), a chance encounter with a biogenetically engineered mermaid (Shiner: "Till Human Voices Wake Us"), bizarre vignettes about Harry Houdini (Rucker: "Tales of Houdini"), the experience of living in a futuristic street gang (Marc Laidlaw: "400 Boys"), the use of genetic intervention to try and escape mortality (James Patrick Kelly: "Solstice") or extend familial legacy (Paul Di Filippo: "Stone Lives"), the struggles of a Russian cosmonaut who finds a second chance at living aboard an aging space station (Sterling and Gibson: "Red Star, Winter Orbit"), and the weirdness of gargoyle-human hybrids seeking love (Greg Bear: "Petra"). *Mirrorshades* shows an incredibly diverse range of stories, and it is hard not to agree on some level with Martin Petto's acrimonious contention that the collection "is really just a bunch of writers who know and like each other and are involved in a loose creative web."

It is this narrative diversity or, perhaps more dismissively, incoherence that highlights another of cyberpunk's key tensions for critics, pundits, and fans alike: Did it ever offer any coherent vision of *cyberpunk* when it first exploded onto the scene in the 1980s? Michael Swanwick, for example, described Rudy Rucker as "no cyberpunk at all, but rather a one-man subgenre all by himself. However, the cyberpunks love him for his daring, excess, and clear-eyed craziness, and have claimed him as one of their own" (43); similarly, Swanwick characterized Bear as a free agent who was isolated from the Movement-era clique and "had independently invented the cyberpunks' style, and they loved him for it. He was welcomed to the ranks with open arms" (38). Gregory Benford could "see no commonality of vision between the various writers to whom the cyberpunk label had been attached beyond the fact that their fiction was 'bedazzled by technoglitz'" (Ashley 52); similarly, David Brin has called cyberpunk "nothing more or less than the best publicity gimmick to come to Speculative/Fiction in years" (qtd. in Kelly 145). As a collection, even *Mirrorshades*'s origins are tainted with opportunism: As James Patrick Kelly explains it, Sterling approached famed sf editor David Hartwell with an idea for a cyberpunk anthology, but was told more authors/stories were needed to publish a marketable collection. Hartwell testified Sterling "said it would be no problem to include twelve, and so he surprised people such as James Patrick Kelly, Greg Bear, and Paul Di Filippo by making them part of the Movement and including them in *Mirrorshades*" (qtd. in Kelly 145).[1] *Mirrorshades* and, more broadly, cyberpunk have therefore always struggled with the perception that it has been nothing but "a marketing strategy masquerading as a literary movement" (Benford, qtd. in Kelly 145).

In spite of such damning criticism, however, the stories in Sterling's *Mirrorshades* are no mere publicity gimmick, even if Sterling was clearly recruiting and subsequently drumming up publicity with this anthology; instead, *Mirrorshades* bears witness to the claims that early cyberpunk was tapping into a "spirit of the new force in sf [that] was pervading the field" (Ashley 47), and

there is no doubt Datlow's and Dozois's respective input in cyberpunk's earliest days coupled with Sterling's keen promotional savvy with *Mirrorshades* helped position cyberpunk at the forefront of 1980s-era movements that it might otherwise not have achieved on its own accord. While the quintessential cyberpunk author may indeed have been a Platonic fiction, Sterling's Preface was nevertheless instrumental in giving cyberpunk some coherent shape and legitimacy as it proceeded to lop and stretch the *Mirrorshades* contributors for its own purposes. For example, toning down the rebellious rhetoric of *Cheap Truth*, Sterling is careful in his Preface to explain the *Mirrorshades* authors are "steeped in the lore and tradition of the SF field" and "cyberpunk is in some sense a return to roots" (x–xi). In his most conciliatory tone, Sterling writes of cyberpunk as "a natural extension of elements already present in science fiction, elements sometimes buried but always seething with potential. Cyberpunk has risen from within the SF genre; it is not an invasion but a modern reform" (xv). While Sterling evokes such cyberpunk precursors as Harlan Ellison, Samuel R. Delany, Norman Spinrad, J.G. Ballard, and Thomas Pynchon, many of whom are addressed in the previous chapter by Rob Latham, he also gives an appreciative shout-out to "the steely extrapolation of Larry Niven, Poul Anderson, and Robert Heinlein" (x), a contrary opinion from Lewis Shiner's earlier description in *Cheap Truth* of Heinlein's 'senile babblings' and Niven's 'California vapidity.' Finally, as befits an anthology that promotes itself as *The Cyberpunk Anthology*, *Mirrorshades* was an opportunity for Sterling to seize some control over the cyberpunk narrative as it was quickly moving away from the margins and was slowly becoming an established form.

The *Mirrorshades* collective, however, isn't all about trading in leather jackets for cardigans in the name of respectability (or book sales); instead, Sterling insistently, perhaps desperately, links cyberpunk to the punk wave of the late-1970s: Cyberpunk's *bricoleurs* prized "their garage-band esthetic" by integrating the "overlapping of worlds that were formerly separate: the realm of high tech, and the modern pop underground" (x–xi). He also links cyberpunk to "Eighties pop culture: in rock video; in the hacker underground; in the jarring street tech of hip-hop and scratch music; in the synthesizer rock of London and Tokyo" (xi–xii). Drawing upon the 'future shock' espoused in futurist Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* (1970) and *The Third Wave* (1980), Sterling helps contextualize cyberpunk as "spontaneous, energetic, close to its roots. Cyberpunk comes from the realm where the computer hacker and the rocker overlap" (xiii). In perhaps the most concise summation (or marketing!) of cyberpunk, Sterling identifies two central themes running through cyberpunk that belie the critics' claims to narrative incoherence: "The theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry—techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of the self" (xiii).

These themes are notable when comparing the two stories that bookend *Mirrorshades*: William Gibson's "The Gernsback Continuum" and Bruce Sterling and Lewis Shiner's "Mozart in Mirrorshades." The former story establishes the defiant tone espoused by *Mirrorshades* and the Movement-turned-cyberpunk sensibility. The protagonist is an American photojournalist hired by publisher Dialta Downes to photograph the architectural detritus of a promised science fictional future that never came to pass, a "1980s that never happened. An architecture of broken dreams" (Gibson 5). As the narrator gets further into the project, however, he begins seeing visions of an America from an alternate timeline, which sends him to his friend Merv Kihn who explains the alternate timeline(s) as "semiotic phantoms, bits of deep cultural imagery that have split off and taken on a life of their own" (29–30). The story's restless attitude shines forth when one of the narrator's ghostly visions reveals a white, blond, and (likely) blue-eyed American family standing in front of a futuristic city that would have been all-too-familiar in the sf of earlier decades: "[T]hey were Heirs to the Dream […]. Here, we'd gone on and on, in a dream logic that knew nothing of pollution, the finite bounds of fossil fuel, of foreign wars it was possible to lose" (9). In spite of the utopian promises of yesteryear's science fiction, this spectral future "had all the sinister fruitiness

of Hitler Youth propaganda" (9). In a manner reminiscent of the rebelliousness saturating the pages of *Cheap Truth* when sf's elder statesmen were engaging in scoffing dismissiveness, Gibson masterfully rejects antiseptic visions of the science fictional futures inspired by the Pulp Age and Golden Age sf of the 1920s–1950s by calling forth comparisons to Hitler Youth propaganda. In so doing, and by virtue of being *Mirrorshades*'s lead-off story, "The Gernsback Continuum" sets the tone for the subsequent stories in the collection and in some ways rejects Sterling's claims in the Preface that cyberpunk "is in some sense a return to roots" (x–xi). Punks didn't always see eye to eye with one another, even if their rebel yells were often aimed in the same direction, and in one deft sentence, Gibson's punkish sneer in "The Gernsback Continuum" undercuts those roots Sterling was trying to cultivate in his Preface.

"Mozart in Mirrorshades" also features alternate timelines, only unlike the subtlety of "The Gernsback Continuum" the punk iconography of "Mozart in Mirrorshades" is both gleefully apparent and ruthlessly harnessed to fuel the story's condemnation of neoliberal capitalism. The protagonist, Rice, is overseeing the management of an 18th-century Salzburg by megacorporations that utilize temporal mechanics to exploit alternate pasts for corporate profit, chiefly by consuming such natural resources as oil or spiriting away not-yet-priceless artwork. As Veronica Hollinger writes for her contribution to this *Companion*, "Mozart in Mirrorshades" positions the past as nothing more than "standing-reserve in the inflexible logic of capitalist expansion, and the Great Acceleration of the American future overwhelms (a version of) 18th-century Austria" (328). Consequently, global history has been completely shattered thanks to these capital interventions from 'Realtime,' which causes growing resentment from those who are not reaping the benefits of corporate expansion; for example, Thomas Jefferson, who has replaced George Washington as America's first president, is upset that "[y]ou guaranteed us liberty and equality and the freedom to pursue our own happiness. Instead we find machinery on all sides, your cheap manufactured goods seducing the people of our great country, our minerals and works of art disappearing into your fortresses, never to reappear!" (226–27). Rice cares little for Jefferson's quibbles; instead, he appears fixated on meeting Marie Antoinette by way of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the famous composer who now sports a "bristling hedgehog cut that had replaced the boy's outmoded wig […] faded jeans, camo jacket, and mirrored sunglasses" (224, 228). After a weeklong sexual marathon with 'Toinette,' which includes such scintillating discussions as the merits of leather bikinis and *Vogue* magazine, Rice is betrayed by the object of his obsession and is captured by Masonistas, at least until he is rescued by a Harley-riding Jebe Noyon who has seemingly abandoned Genghis Khan to join the Trans-Temporal Army. Rice returns to Salzburg to find the megacorporations are pulling out of the alternate 18th century. Rice also learns Mozart orchestrated Rice's capture by the Masonistas, but Mozart escapes any repercussions thanks to his *Billboard* success—he is #5 on the charts!—and a new record contract from Realtime that not only promises salvation from the 18th century but also rewards him with all the trappings of neoliberal capitalism: cars, women, and access to the finest recording studios. The final image of the story is Rice retreating down the tunnel toward Realtime carrying an unconscious Toinette over his shoulder. "Mozart in Mirrorshades" is therefore a prime example of cyberpunk prizing "the bizarre, the surreal, [and] the formerly unthinkable" (Sterling xiv–xv) while also exhibiting what becomes *de rigueur* in cyberpunk: late capitalist enterprises ruthlessly exploiting and mining (human and nonhuman) resources.

The most thematically similar stories in *Mirrorshades*—or, dare I say, the most quintessentially cyberpunk—are John Shirley's "Freezone" (1985) and Pat Cadigan's "Rock On" (1984), the former an excerpt from his novel *Eclipse* and the latter a thematic preview of Cadigan's future novel, the Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning *Synners* (1991). Shirley's story follows Rick Rickenharp and the downfall of his rock 'n roll band as it performs its last concert on Freezone, a floating aggregation of offshore drilling platforms in the Atlantic Ocean that "dealt in pleasant distractions for the rich in the exclusive section and—in the second-string places around the edge—for technickis from the

drill rigs. The second-string places also sheltered a few semi-illicit hangers-on and a few hundred performers. Like Rickenharp" (141–42). Although Rickenharp and his band perform the show of a lifetime, declining sales figures from their two previous recordings coupled with internal squabbles have doomed the band. The squabbles center on whether the band should go *minimono*, a musical style bucking the waning trend known as the *flare* whose adherents wear their "hair *up*, as far over the top of [the] head as possible and in some way that *expressed*, that emphasized the wearer's individuality, originality. The more colors the better" (Shirley 144). Rickenharp expresses some respect for the *flare*, in part because he is more apt to bed flare women, but has no patience for *minimono* and the "stultifying regularity of their canned music" (Shirley 145). The monochromatically styled *minimono* fans are easily recognizable by their "flat-black, flat-gray, monochrome tunics and jumpsuits, the black wristfones, the cookie-cutter sameness" (Shirley 145), while their musicians are physically wired into the "impulse-translation pickups on the stage floor, making [them] look like a puppet with its strings inverted […]. The long, funereal wails pealing from hidden speakers were triggered by the muscular contractions of his arms and legs and torso" (Shirley 145–46). *Flare* or *minimono* is a moot distinction: Neither style speaks to Rickenharp's identification with punk music, and he breaks with his band after they finally decide to go *minimono* and yearn for a wire-dancer who can bring them mainstream *Billboard* glory. "Freezone" is therefore caught between conflicting sentiments: On the one hand, Rickenharp (and Shirley) is defiantly rebellious in his refusal to allow a punk sensibility to simply roll over and die in the face of changing musical tides; on the other hand, there is a palpable acceptance that for all his revolutionary swagger, Rickenharp and punk are déclassé, finding themselves again in the margins that are both exhilarating and exhausting for punk pioneers. After all, by the end of the story Rickenharp is unceremoniously left to drop blue mescaline and lose himself in Freezone with a new set of characters who are trying to escape Freezone without alerting The Second Alliance International Security Corporation. In the end, there is very little sense, at least in this excerpt from *Eclipse*, that a punk sensibility will actually get you anywhere beyond wandering a recommissioned oil rig in a drug-induced haze.[2]

Gina, the first-person narrator of Cadigan's "Rock On," is also seeking escape, and in a comparable manner to Rickenharp, she is also desperately seeking freedom from the *Billboard Top 40* corporate commodification of rock 'n roll. Gina is a human synthesizer, a *sinner*,[3] locked into an exploitative contract with Man-O-War: As a *sinner*, she is the cybernetic talent behind Man-O-War's public success. Thanks to implanted sockets that allow her to literally plug into the band, Gina can rock

> Man-O-War through the wires, giving him the meat and bone that made him Man-O-War and the machines picking it up, sound and vision, so all the tube babies all around the world could play it on their screens whenever they wanted. Forget the road, forget the shows, too much trouble […]. And the tapes weren't as good as the stuff in the head, rock 'n roll visions straight from the brain […]. In the end, they didn't have to play instruments unless they really wanted to, and why bother? Let the synthesizer take their imaginings and boost them up to Mount Olympus. (39–40)

Recognized in a Greek greasy spoon as a runaway *sinner*, Gina is forced by the members of the talent-stifled band Misbegotten to work her *sinning* skills. Unfortunately, Gina's latest side-project attracts Man-O-War's attention and ruins Misbegotten's chances at rock 'n roll glory: "Man-O-War had his conglomerate start to buy Misbegotten right after the first tape came out. Deal all done by the time we'd finished the third one, and they never knew" (41). Gina expresses her contempt for Man-O-War, who she accuses of killing rock 'n roll, all the while Man-O-War counters that Gina is trying to bury it alive, but the debate is futile: Gina is marched off to continue

serving out her contract as Man-O-War's *sinner*, and corporate rock 'n roll continues to dominate the marketplace.

As the only woman-authored story in the *Mirrorshades* collection, Cadigan's "Rock On" highlights one of cyberpunk's initial problems: its unmistakable lack of diversity. Samuel R. Delany has commented on the under-acknowledged influence of 1970s feminist sf upon cyberpunk, an influence "whose obliteration created such a furor when Bruce Sterling (inadvertently of course …?) elided it from his introduction to [William Gibson's] *Burning Chrome* [collection]. Sometimes it seems as though these male writers were trying to sublate the whole feminist movement unto themselves—which can only be done at the expense of history" (173). Similarly, Kelly remarks upon cyberpunk's "heteronormative conventions of gender, sexuality, and power […] there was a huge disparity between the number of strong male characters and the number of strong female characters, and gay and lesbian characters were all but invisible" (151). A few years later, Nicola Nixon, in her article "Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?," convincingly argued "cyberpunk fiction is, in the end, not radical at all. Its slickness and apparent subversiveness conceal a complicity with '80s conservatism" (231). At the same time, cyberpunk's problematic, if not outwardly hostile, approach to race has largely been overlooked and is the subject of Isiah Lavender's "Critical Race Theory" chapter in this *Companion*. Focusing on Steven Barnes's *Streetlethal* (1983), *Gorgon Child* (1989), and *Firedance* (1993), Lavender writes that Barnes's use of black and brown skin color for his characters demystifies a literary mode resolutely designed by others to exclude black authors—a decision purposefully made by Bruce Sterling in his codifying of cyberpunk in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* (1986), as if mentioning 'the visionary shimmer of Samuel Delany' (x) and 'the jarring tech of hip hop' (xii) make it impervious to claims of racism" (313). Lavender sees in the emergence of Afrocyberpunk, however, "another way to describe black speculative cultural practices, only with particular attention to cyberspace, simulations, and/or virtual realities (technical or biological) as sites of revolution and social reform" that "offer us consciously racialized settings in their imaginings, resolutely challenging the whiteness of cyberpunk" (314; 315).

It is this widespread homogeneity that later writers reformed, if not outright rejected, including a late-1980s and early-1990s wave of writings from Cadigan, Laura Mixon, Mary Rosenblum, and others that was an expression of what Karen Cadora calls a 'feminist cyberpunk' that challenged cyberpunk's heteronormative assumptions and conventions. Or, as Lisa Yaszek writes in "Feminist Cyberpunk," such works as "[Gwyneth] Jones's *Escape Plans* (1986), [Candas Jane] Dorsey's "(Learning About) Machine Sex" (1988), and [Lisa] Mason's *Arachne* (1990) put women at the front and center of their cyberpunk worlds" (35).

By virtue of its self-promotion, *The Cyberpunk Anthology* may have also been contributing to the idea that cyberpunk had already died by a thousand paper cuts by the time of *Mirrorshades*'s own publication. Lewis Shiner's *New York Times* editorial "Confessions of an Ex-Cyberpunk" (1991) is the most damning coroner's report: Writers quickly began to turn "form into formula: implant wetware (biological computer chips), government by multinational corporations, street-wise, leather-jacketed, amphetamine-loving protagonists and decayed orbital colonies." According to Rucker, however, Shiner was already digging cyberpunk's grave as far back as 1985 when, after a fractious cyberpunk conference panel featuring Shiner, Sterling, Rucker, Cadigan, and Bear, Shiner reportedly asked "So I guess cyberpunk is dead now?" (209). Sterling certainly provided an added signatory to cyberpunk's death certificate when, in his essay "Cyberpunk in the Nineties" (1991), he acknowledged that the cyberpunk pioneers, most of whom were in their forties when Sterling wrote his essay but are now in their sixties and seventies, "are no longer a Bohemian underground. This too is an old story in Bohemia; it is the standard punishment for success. An underground in the light of day is a contradiction in terms. Respectability does not merely beckon; it actively envelops. And in this sense, 'cyberpunk' is even deader than Shiner admits." In this regard, *Mirrorshades* may actually be regarded as cyberpunk's funeral procession, perhaps

even its tombstone, for a Movement that had quickly gone mainstream, its upstart rebelliousness sacrificed upon the altar of conventional acceptance and commercialization. It is arguably for this reason that so many members of the *Mirrorshades* collective made concerted efforts to distance themselves from cyberpunk as the 1980s waned; however, cyberpunk's eulogies were premature. As Sherryl Vint and I wrote in "The Sea Change(s) of Cyberpunk, "we have never more been in need of a fiction capable of engaging with the world as shaped by information technology, which perhaps explains the sub-genre's persistent afterlife" (xii). That afterlife is evident in a 1990s that ushered forth new generations of authors who would push literary cyberpunk in new directions that has carried forth well into the 21st century; similarly, visual cyberpunk—films, television shows, comic books, and video games—continue to expose cyberpunk and its visual motifs to a vast audience.[4]

In the end, the *Mirrorshades* collective provided the genetic material for a range of literary and visual motifs that ensured cyberpunk "didn't so much die as experience a sea change into a more generalized cultural formation" (Foster xiv), a central premise informing not only *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture* but also my two previous collections, *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives* (co-edited with Sherryl Vint) and *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture* (co-edited with Lars Schmeink). In hindsight, we can look back and recognize that *Mirrorshades* and 1980s-era cyberpunk embody not so much a genre or sub-genre organized around distinct or formal components but, instead, a cultural formation which is "a historical articulation of textual practices with 'a variety of other cultural, social, economic, historical and political practices'" (Foster xvi). Alternately, cyberpunk can also be thought of as a parabola—i.e., "more concrete than themes, more complex than motifs, parabolas are combinations of meaningful setting, character, and action that lend themselves to endless redefinition and jazzlike improvisation" (Attebery and Hollinger vii)—that continues to offer seemingly endless redefinitions and improvisations, whether we use such labels as feminist cyberpunk, second- and third-wave cyberpunk, postcolonial cyberpunk, and/or post-cyberpunk. Sterling's Preface to *Mirrorshades* may have committed early cyberpunk to the axis of body invasion and mind invasion, but *The Cyberpunk Anthology* also exemplifies Sterling's point that, again, the cyberpunk "label is an uneasy bed of Procrustes" (ix), and as our techno-saturated world looks increasingly like the cyberpunk worlds of fiction, *Mirrorshades* continues to resonate, albeit imperfectly and not-unproblematically, with the cyberpunk futures that surround us.

Notes

1 This account was essentially confirmed to me by David Hartwell in a social conversation when he and I both sat on the Executive Board for the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts (2007–10).
2 For a damning, but no less accurate, reading of the sexist overtones in Shirley's "Freezone," see Petto for details.
3 Although Cadigan later modifies the spelling to "synner" in her novel *Synners*, the first appearance in "Rock On" is spelled "sinner."
4 For more details, please consult other entries in this collection and/or *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture* (2018), edited by Graham J. Murphy and Lars Schmeink.

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4

BRUCE STERLING: *SCHISMATRIX PLUS* (CASE STUDY)

María Goicoechea

In the early 1980s during cyberpunk's heyday, Bruce Sterling published a series of short stories and a novel that shared the same far-future scenario, characterized by the tensions between two different factions and their antagonistic approaches toward (post)human evolution. A decade later, *Schismatrix Plus* (1996) collected this sprawling Shaper/Mechanist series—"Swarm" (1982), "Spider Rose" (1982), "Cicada Queen" (1983), "Sunken Gardens" (1984), "Twenty Evocations" (a.k.a. "Life in the Shaper/Mechanist Era: Twenty Evocations"; 1984), and *Schismatrix* (1985)—and, in the volume's introduction, Sterling proudly proclaims that "[t]hese stories, and this novel, are the most 'cyberpunk' works I will ever write" but also that this is "all there is" (viii), implying that he has given closure to the themes he wanted to explore. Although Sterling never returned to this narrative universe, his vividly imagined posthuman embodiments continue to flesh out the phantasmagorical fantasies of western posthumanism, a train of thought still much entrenched in humanism's dualisms: self/other, body/soul, object/subject, material/virtual, and biological/technological. Sterling's saga thus presents a suitable tableau to discuss contemporary debates regarding posthumanism and transhumanism, without losing sight of cyberpunk's foundational myths.

Most critics and reviewers have underscored Sterling's capacity to imagine posthuman subjects when the term 'posthuman' was still in its critical infancy. As Veronica Hollinger has pointed out, *Schismatrix* is "one of the earliest sf scenarios consciously to construct its characters as 'posthuman' and explore some of the implications of the term" (269). Posthumanism has now evolved into an umbrella term, a theoretical concept used in so many different fields of study—including science and technology studies (STS), philosophy, critical theory, architecture, communication studies, and bioethics—that it is difficult to discern what is meant by it in each case. This is complicated by the use of the term by transhumanists, who see the posthuman subject as the ultimate stage of their ongoing transformation toward an enhanced human, whose intellectual and physiological capacities will no longer classify her as merely human.[1]

In navigating this fraught terrain, Tamar Sharon distinguishes four broad approaches to the term posthuman: "a 'dystopic,' a 'liberal,' a 'radical,' and a 'methodological' posthumanism" (5). While dystopic and liberal positions are politically defined by their rejection or embrace of the technology used to enhance human capabilities, the radical and methodological approaches correspond to current academic discourses in cultural theory and philosophy. The radical position includes the optimistic visions of Donna J. Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, and Rosi Braidotti, among others, who see emerging biotechnologies as destabilizing agents of western anthropocentric, patriarchal, and racist foundational discourses. The methodological approach represents

a more 'neutral' field of scientific exploration (STS scholars and philosophers such as Don Ihde or Bruno Latour) that has found it necessary to transcend the previous paradigm of the human as subject distinct from the world (object) to better account for the interaction between humans and nonhuman entities. In the end, the "most important axis of differentiation between the various types of approaches to the posthuman," Sharon concludes, "runs not between their celebratory or condemnatory inclinations, but between their humanist or nonhumanist underpinnings, where humanism refers to the view that upholds a foundational ontological divide between humans and the rest of the world" (4–5).

Sharon's cartography privileges the academic debate between humanist and nonhumanist positions, in part because this discourse has taken the central stage among critical/theoretical discussions of posthumanism; however, the dystopic and liberal lines, typically embodied by the Luddite and the technophile (or transhumanist), run not only through popular culture, including science fiction's (sf) portrayals of posthuman characters in novels, films, comics, and video games, but also through scientific narratives (see Coyne 1999).[2] What is obvious is that academic and popular cultures intersect and mirror one another, both impinging on what it means to be posthuman by producing overlapping, at-times contradictory, definitions. In this regard, sf's creative freedom can provide an honest, unpretentious, and raw depiction of the desires and nightmares that populate our contemporary culture and "find fitting cultural illustrations of the changes and transformations that are taking place in the forms of relations available in our post-human present" (Braidotti 203). Cyberpunk's foundational narratives regarding the posthuman are particularly fecund, as they often depict strangely alluring but equally discordant, even repellant, futures founded upon a cutting-edge punk sensibility which, as some of the contributors in this volume have outlined, often fails to be absolutely radical, especially when it comes to imagining alternative subject positions that do not perpetuate patriarchal, heteronormative, and/or racist discourses.[3] It is within this terrain that *Schismatrix Plus* occupies a central position in the cyberpunk canon, particularly in its complicated, perhaps contradictory, handling of posthumanism. Sterling's posthumanism proposes a fascinating mixture between technoromantic utopia and a nihilist cybergothic dystopia, which are the dominant and countercultural trends of our western digital narratives,[4] coupled with nuanced readings of the theories of Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine, who shaped Sterling's understanding of biological evolution for this sequence.

As opposed to the near-future settings common to cyberpunk and popularized by such contemporaries as William Gibson, Lewis Shiner, or John Shirley, Sterling's *Schismatrix Plus* is set in a distant future where cyberpunk fantasies have been fully developed: The time frame spans from Spider Rose's birth in 2045 ("Spider Rose") to the events of "Sunken Gardens," set in 2554. In these five centuries, we follow the history of (post)humanity beyond planet Earth, in which (post) humans, ideologically divided by different evolutionary choices, inhabit and explore outer space in a continuous flow of physical, ecological, political, and technological transformations. The main source of conflict is a fracture in society caused by opposed interpretations of what constitutes our (post)humanity. On the one hand, the Shapers have pursued biogenetic modifications to create a race of *quasi*-perfect clones imbued with both beauty and intelligence. The Shapers (a.k.a. the Reshaped) have evolved as a transhumanist utopia that has set no limits to gene manipulation, surgical operations, and nanotechnological intrusion into not only the human body but also the ecosystem at large. Shapers reproduce by means of cloning and cast aside 'unplanned' humans as an inferior caste, since they consider it their mission to bring humanity to its perfection as a species. Their ideal of purity leads them into a never-ending struggle in order to maintain virus-free artificial ecosystems where the clones can live. On the other hand, the Mechanists have achieved a total alliance with the machine, supplementing their bodies with prosthetics and even managing to transfer human consciousness to computer circuits. They use all sorts of prostheses, allowing the mechanical elements to slowly invade their bodies. According to the Shapers, the

Mechanists' evolutionary path will lead them to a dead end, since at some point, everything will be transformed into metal and programming, leaving aside willpower and imagination—in sum, life. It is the beautiful and super-intelligent Shapers, however, who end up exalting the power of science and intelligence over emotions, becoming enslaved brains at the service of their Shaper ideology. Even their much-vaunted intelligence proves dangerous, as dissident Shaper factions like the Patternists have experienced, often becoming mentally unstable and developing "autism, fugue states, paranoia" (*Schismatrix Plus* 304).

While the two factions war with one another, they harbor the same dream: They desire immortality achieved through any means possible, including the inoculation of a cell-regeneration virus in the original body, a series of clones that would serve as backup copies of the self, and/or the transfer of the subject's identity (understood as pure data flow) to a mechanical body, a computer network, and even to a sentient architectonic structure. In sum, any shape imaginable could possibly be inhabited by a (post)human consciousness. As a result of this sprawling narrative canvass, the Shaper/Mechanist battles take place along ethical borders, ideological disquisitions, and taboos regarding what can and cannot be tampered with. To further complicate matters, the conscious manipulation of evolution in Sterling's universe has not been univocal or unidirectional, and the Shaper/Mechanist branches are themselves giving way to a proliferation of different factions, all while the solar system is being colonized by omnipotent aliens, the Investors, who have the secret of 'starflight' and enjoy abusing their (post)human inferiors with cheap swindles. In Sterling's saga, each evolutionary path consequently gives way to different societies, where mass defections from failed experiments to more promising ones are customary. Sterling has therefore devoted this whole saga to exploring the future evolution of (post)humanity with such a richness of detail and vivid description that he has made of those imaginings the *raison d'être* of the Shaper/Mechanist universe. Or, as Tom Maddox has observed, "more so than any SF writer with whom I am familiar, Sterling has explored the Other as the future of our becoming" (238).

The protagonist of *Schismatrix*, the longest contribution to the Shaper/Mechanist series, is Abelard Lindsay, who lives torn between his Mechanist origin and his Shaper education. Lindsay uses this in-between state to his advantage by stepping from one mode of consciousness to the other, depending on the occasion. For example:

> Lindsay was afraid. He closed his eyes and called on his Shaper training, the ingrained strength of ten years of psychotechnic discipline. He felt his mind slide subtly into its second mode of consciousness. His posture altered, his movements were smoother, his heart beat faster. Confidence seeped into him, and he smiled. His mind felt sharper, cleaner, cleansed of inhibitions, ready to twist and manipulate. His fear and guilt faltered and warped away, a tangle of irrelevance. (*Schismatrix Plus* 14)

In this instance, the mode of consciousness associated with Shaper training refers to a rational, cold, and calculating point of view, associated with the scientific method. After all, to the Reshaped, fear is one of those emotions that makes one vulnerable, a feeling which the Mechanists, on the other hand, do not attempt to repress. Later in the novel, Lindsay has been kidnapped by Mechanist pirates who are attacking a mysterious asteroid-shaped spacecraft that encloses a labyrinth of dark passages. It is within this cybergothic setting[5] that a clan of exceptionally gifted and beautiful Shapers, fearful of being contaminated by microbes, assassinate the Mechanist pirates one by one. The Shapers' mind control techniques, emotional suppression, and scientific method turn them into lethal weapons while the Mechanists, who have not disowned their emotions and feelings, possess a vital instinct that makes them feel dangerously alive.

At the end of *Schismatrix*, Lindsay considers the transfer of his 'soul' to a newly designed, high technology "Angel" that is described in the advertising brochure as "an aquatic posthuman. The

skin was smooth and black and slick. The legs and pelvic girdle were gone; the spine extended to long muscular flukes. Scarlet gills trailed from the neck. The ribcage was black openwork, gushing white, feathery nets packed with symbiotic bacteria" (232). The brochure goes on to describe this posthuman body in exquisite detail, including "long black arms […] dotted with phosphorescent patches," "nerve-packed stripes [that] housed a new aquatic sense that could feel the water's trembling," a "nose [that] led to lung-like sacs packed with chemosensitive cells," "lidless eyes [that] were huge," and a skull "rebuilt to accommodate them" (232). Lindsay learns these Angels glow and are "self-sufficient, drawing life, warmth, everything from water" (232). And, in the interest of reproduction, "[c]hildren can be created. But these creatures can last out centuries" (232). It is in this description of the Angels, however, that we see a common motif in Sterling's *Schismatrix Plus*: Sterling's posthuman future is often torn between technoromantic heaven and a cybergothic hell. The Angels are a technoromantic fantasy of posthuman self-sufficiency and eternity complicated by religious overtones, the potentially humanist desire to return to a primeval state of unity with the liquid element of the maternal uterus, the immediate satisfaction of corporeal needs without exertion, and the reverie of a pure and aseptic body that remains somehow uncorrupted thanks to state-of-the-art technology.[6] This Angel therefore serves as an unsettling reminder of the ethical dilemma we humans face as a species: We have encoded in ourselves the capacity through technological transformation to modify the physical and cognitive characteristics that have up to this point defined our identity. Sterling's Angel is not too far from a terrifying and phantasmagorical vision of the sort of creature that a (post)human being can become; as a result, this distorted image of a return to some aquatic Eden shows how close technoromantic fantasies are to a cybergothic imagination: They are two sides of the same coin for Sterling and speak to our at-times blind faith in technological progress. The Shapers in Sterling's Shaper/Mechanist universe therefore represent the technoromantic ideal of perfect (post)human beings, quasi-divine and asexual, whereas the Mechanists symbolize the beliefs of the cybergothic by vindicating the power of emotions as that which distinguishes them as (post)human beings.[7]

These well-defined lines drawn in *Schismatrix* between the technoromantic and the cybergothic are blurred in the Shaper/Mechanist short stories. The attitudes of Shapers and Mechanists in these stories are not so easily discriminated, providing an even more nuanced reading of evolutionary choices. For example, "Swarm," the first short story in this saga, contains many of the themes developed in the rest of the stories: the economic war between the two main factions, the mercenary ethics, and the life-or-death struggle for survival in hostile environments, to name a few examples. Its protagonist, Simon Afriel, is a member of the Shapers on a 'research' mission to an alien asteroid inhabited by a primitive collective society. This alien culture, or swarm, is likened to a beehive or an ant colony and, seemingly devoid of any self-awareness or intelligence, is presented as an ideal society where innocence reigns, there is no knowledge of good or evil, and "it's always warm and dark, smells good, and food is easy to get, and everything is endlessly and perfectly recycled" (247). Afriel's companion, Doctor Galina Mirny, a researcher whose in-depth work on the swarm defines her life, remarks that this subterranean kind of heaven could last unchanged for thousands of years, but Afriel dismissively replies: "In another thousand years we'll be machines, or gods" (248). Afriel's Shaper bias shines forth, and when confronted by Doctor Mirny with his mercantilist, rather than scientific, objectives, he defends himself by attacking his opponents: He describes to Doctor Mirny the extreme factions of the Mechanists as "more than half machine. Do you expect humanitarian motives from them? They're cold, Doctor—cold and soulless creatures who can cut a living man or woman to bits and never feel their pain. Most of the other factions hate us. They call us racist supermen" (247). Pushed to the limits of their ideology, Mechanist and Shaper factions then represent similarly 'barbaric' or inhumane positions: the absolute lack of compassion and empathy associated with the machine, versus the superiority and racism of the 'enhanced' human, the superhuman.