

Authors' Definitions and Utterances about Cyberpunk

The Cyberpunk Project 1999

These are from an interview with Bruce Sterling :

We Meant It

Read my Introduction to Mirrorshades. I think it stands as the central public relations document for cyberpunk. Look, some people think we did this just to be cute. You know ? They're wrong, very severely wrong. We meant it.

Cyberpunk Then and Now

When we first started cyberpunk, we really wanted to come in under the radar - out of this little science fiction subculture - just knock people flat on their backs. And we really did it. Nobody could have foreseen the futures we imagined. Things have changed since the early days of cyberpunk and I, for one, am a lot more interested in the deep theoretical issues. Sure, I do stuff that's like MTV video, flash imagery - but with a sting in the tail. I want to get behind people's eyes. I want to get to the stage of knowledge as power.

Transcendence is Just Part of the Gig

The element of transcendence is just a feature of the SF genre, like feedback in rock music. It's amove. Like I wrote a book - *Schismatrix* - that ends with a character attaining cosmic transcendence. He's eaten by an alien and becomes this pure spirit who gets to go around the universe and observe. It's just a riff. People who take that stuff seriously end up turning into trolls. H.P. Lovecraft was a big fan of that cosmic-type stuff. That may be okay for him, but from the outside what you see is this pasty-faced guy eating canned hash in the dim corner of a restaurant, hands trembly and a gray film over his eyes. Lovecraft was a sick old man who died young. A troll. You've got to remain equipped to deal with this world.

This is from Rudy Rucker, from an issue of the academic literary magazine *Mississippi Review* 47/48 :

What's really good about punk is that it's fast and dense. It has lot of information. If you value information the most, then you don't care about convention. It's not "Who do you know ?"; it's "How fast are you ? How dense ?". It's not, "Do you talk like my old friends ?"; it's "Is this interesting ?". So what I'm talking about with cyberpunk is something like this : literate SF that's easy to read, has a lot of information, and talks about the new thoughtforms that are coming out of the computer revolution.

Cyberpunk suggests that SF really can be about the world, and not just about the author's mind. For me, the best thing about cyberpunk is that it taught me how to enjoy shopping malls, which used to terrify me. Now I just pretend that the whole thing is two miles below the moon's surface, and that half the people's right-brains have been eaten by robotized steel rats. And suddenly it's interesting again.

These next four comments are taken from an interview with William Gibson :

Neuromancer

What's most important to me is that *Neuromancer* is about the present. It's not really about an imagined future. It's a way of trying to come to terms with the awe and terror inspired in me by the world in which we live. I'm anxious to know what they'll make of it in Japan.

When you read *Neuromancer* the impression is very complicated, but it's all actually one molecule thick. Some of it is still pretty much of a mystery to me. You know, the United States is never mentioned in the book. And there's some question as to whether the United States exists as a political entity or if, in fact, it's been Balkanized in some weird way. That's kind of a favourite idea of mine, that the world should be chopped up into smaller pieces.

If there's a movie of *Neuromancer*, what I really want the special-effects guys to do is to make you see, from Case's point of view, the little acid giggies. I've never seen that in a movie. It'd be very easy to do with animation and so forth : the little lines and trails coming off of things.

Burroughs

I'm deeply influenced by Burroughs. I didn't think I'd be able to put that over on the American science-fiction people, because they either don't know who Burroughs is, or they're immediately hostile... he found fifties science fiction and used it like a rusty can opener on society's jugular. They never understood. But I was like fifteen when I read *Naked Lunch*, and it sorta splattered my head all over the walls. I have my megalomaniac fantasy of some little kid in Indiana picking up *Neuromancer* and POW ! I had to teach myself not to write too much like Burroughs. He was that kind of influence. I had to weed some of that Burroughsian stuff out of it. In an interview in London, in one of my rare lucid moments, I told this guy that the difference between what Burroughs did and what I did is that Burroughs would just glue the stuff down on the page, but I airbrushed it all.

Count Zero

At the end of *Neuromancer*, the entire Matrix is sentient. It has, in some ways, one will. And, as it tells Case, kind of matter-of-factly, it's found another of its kind on Alpha Centauri or somewhere, so it's got something to talk to. *Count Zero* starts seven years later, and like Yeats's poem about how the center wouldn't hold, this sort of God-consciousness is now fragmented. It hasn't been able to keep it together. So the voodoo cultists in the Sprawl, who believe that they have contacted the voodoo pantheon through the Matrix, are in fact dealing with these fragmented elements of this God thing. And the fragments are much more demonic and more human, reflecting cultural

expectations.

Sterling

Bruce Sterling is my favourite science-fiction writer. *Schismatrix* is the most visionary science-fiction novel of the last twenty years or so. Humanity evolves, mutates through different forms very quickly, using genetic engineering and biochemistry. It's a real mindfucker. When he first got it out and was getting the reviews back, he told me, "there are so many moving parts, people are scared to stick their heads on it". People will be mining that, ripping off ideas, for the next thirty years.