

The Cyberpunk of the '80s or the Humanization of the Metal

The Cyberpunk Project

We live in Cyberspace, we are everywhere, we know no boundaries. We are those, the Different. The technological rats, swimming in the ocean of information. We do not have many friends, only a few with whom we go to the parties. Everybody else we know we know on the net. Our real friends are there, on the other side of the line. Cyberpunks.

-- Christian As. Kirtchev, *a Cyberpunk Manifesto*

One can hardly ignore a combination of nihilism and technology. The marks of the cyberpunk movement : a complete annihilation of the optimism, of the possibility of construction of Self into the real space, its results being the refuge into virtual, the quest of liberty in that environment behind the monitor, imagined as an infinite of nets and the feeling of belonging to a community. A community special in itself because it does not fit in a certain place but is only dwelling in the minds of its inhabitants.

With the drop of madness specific to any genuine start, they, - as well as the romantics, the futurists, the surrealists at their time, - wanted to find their inner selves not by adapting to the outside world but by changing it accordingly. Unlike the others, the cyberpunks were not starting with a radical change of the present but were imagining and constructing it in a frame of the future.

Gibson, in his Neuromancer drew the premises of this visionary frame. His Cyberspace was seen like "a collective hallucination daily experimented by millions of legitimate operators... a graphical representation of abstract data, sent from the keyboard to every computer in this human system... an unimaginable complexity... gatherings and constellations of information". In this world, the individuals were directly connected to the net through their own nervous system; the cyberspace was thus becoming the world created at the confluence of each nervous system connected to the net with the databases of the matrices.

From a tool, the technology was thus growing into a purpose. For the first time, it was seen accordingly with its potentiality of becoming an art, of being imagination, and giving new roads for sounds, images, senses.

For the first time, it was given a leak into the daily boredom of the great metropolis' suburbs towards an un-real space. If the hippies were suggesting the goingaway to the countryside, to the rustic, far away from the urban, and the punkers were seeking refuge in the underground spaces of the urban, the cyberpunk philosophy is that of a runaway towards nowhere and everywhere, into another dimension, an imaginary one and, by this virtuality, an even more tempting one.

There emerges the idea of community extrapolated to a new frame, as a reality limited by boundaries could no longer be found; this community could be accessed by any modem, from any computer connected worldwide. So, the cyberpunk culture is becoming the first for which the intended refugee - different and yet in the same dimension with the linearly urban they were running away from - is not the real but the imaginary. By this imaginary, the complete liberty to deny was taking its place.

The previous punk stream of the late '70s generation, a confused generation, prematurely aged by the unemployment and by the industrial insipid of the urban, has crushed everything, blowing everything away : the music, the fashion, the mass media. It was a total desperation.

This NO has been taken over by the cyberpunks, without extrapolating it to the dimensions of the new technologies; on the contrary, those have become the alternative of refugee in front of the mundane stifled in the same rusty frames.

The 1984, the year of Gibson's *Neuromancer*, also represented the temporal frame wherein the PCs started to be increasingly often found on desks, wherein the nets developed and became more and more accessible to universities and corporations, wherein the circulatory speed increased and by that determining the rapid assimilation of the new technologies. The boundaries between the imaginary and real seemed every time more relative.

In this context, the cyberpunk movement's development occurred in the main stream of change and shortly was assimilated and denominated as the predominant cultural frame of those times - the '80s.

"It's a way of looking at the world that combines an infatuation with high-tech tools and a disdain for conventional ways of using them" (Elmer-Dewitt) is the phrase that went along best in the cultural chaos of the time. Actually, it is a direct relationship between Dewitt's symbolical definition and the pure formal construction of the word cyberpunk, as a mixture of cybernetics and punk.

Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* draws the frame of the new cyberpunk style : a paradoxical mixture of high-tech and precarious life style. As a matter of fact, Gibson's sentence continues as the symbol of the main stream : "The street has its own uses for technology".

And it all started to grow from here : a writer from Texas, Bruce Sterling, when publishing a fanzine, a sum of articles integrated in a choleric, temperamental style, signed with a pseudonym, started to define the stylistic directions of the cyberpunk movement.

If Gibson was the initiator of the stream, Sterling may as well be considered as the one who imprinted its vital structure, as he was the catalyzer of the entire movement, determining to all these directions an unitary direction and integrating them in what they had of specific.

By its unexpected - the double consideration of the technologies as tools as well as, ideatically, means of artistic expression - the cyber movement - though the past tense is rather used about it as we speak - left an important mark in the époque also by the reconsideration of the human-technologic interaction, precisely of the existing conflict at the level of the new technologies' application.