

Anime

The Cyberpunk Project

Anime films are cartoons, usually from Japan, with adult subject matter. Despite the prevailing American view that cartoons are for children, Japanese view anime as a legitimate art form that is appropriate for adult viewing. Anime subjects vary widely from soap opera drama, to medieval adventures, to science fiction.

Many of the sci-fi anime films exhibit traits that are common to the cyberpunk ethic. Not all anime is cyberpunk, and even the stuff that is has a unique feel to it. Anime films are a separate entity, and can't be lumped into an all encompassing genre. But, despite this, they do share a lot of traits with cyberpunk that make them similar. The medium might be different, the language foreign and the ideas bizarre, but in the final analysis, anime is a lot like cyberpunk.

Big Eyes, Huge Guns, Really Bad Dubbing

This text is from Ruben Garza, Jr.

Cyberpunk as a genre seems to defy a precise definition, but several common themes can be used to exemplify what ideals the "movement" represents. This movement is a new view of the world, one in which neither apocalypse nor utopia is presented. Those involved in creating cyberpunk show the current global situation, only much more so. They extrapolate from current events and take it to a higher degree. Almost everything in their fictional worlds is recognizable to modern readers, only they have projected technology and events into a future that is possible.

The creators of anime present views of the future that are often very similar. Big robots, crowded metropolises, and powerful corporations are all commonplace. The Tessier-Ashpool mega-corp of *Neuromancer* can be likened to GENOM, a multinational corporation from *Bubblegum Crisis*. The Tessier-Ashpool artificial intelligences, Wintermute and Neuromancer, quietly amassed power and eventually changed the world. This idea of technology out of control is mirrored in GENOM's escaped Boomers. Boomers are pretty much Terminator endoskeletons, but even more bulky. Occasionally, one would escape and wreak havoc on the surrounding city. Both the novel and the anime film examine the social ramifications of technology beyond human intervention. And while it is true that Gibson's take on it is much more subtle, watching a Boomer get blown up by a cyberbabe in power armor can be pretty rewarding in its own right.

A Boomer cocks his head, small optical relays click. He almost grins. A split second later, a helicopter is going down in flames.

...he sees that the dark wavelike phenomenon was a wave of blood ... a miniaturized gatling gun ... whirs around. (Stephenson, 361)

The feelings evoked by these two passages are similar. Although the first quote was my pitiful attempt to

paraphrase the animated action of *Bubblegum Crisis*; you can clearly see that directors of anime seem to share literary cyberpunks' fascination with cool tech. The Boomer's gun that spews zillions of rounds of superheated death is reminiscent of Stephenson's depleted uranium Reason gatling gun. The film makers and authors of cyberpunk aren't afraid to go over the top with their tech. Their confidence that the audience will believe the extraordinary shows how desensitized we have become to advances in weaponry and technology in general.

While the technology in the anime films is even more outrageous than that of most literary works, the idea of making it cool is always paramount. Cyberpunk creators love the idea of creating characters that look and act cool, as well as creating an environment for these cool people to run around in. Gibson's Molly and Stephenson's Hiro Protagonist can be compared with Pris from *Bubblegum Crisis* and Isamu Dyson from *Macross Plus*. Molly and Hiro are cool. They are amazing fighters, know all the street jive, and can handle themselves in any situation. Pris and Isamu, although animated, are cut from the same cloth.

Pris, in the second episode of *Bubblegum Crisis*, is captured and handcuffed by three Boomers. Without batting an eyelash, she jumps from the back seat of the car, kicks the driver, and jumps out the window. All the while the car is careening out of control, nearly hitting pedestrians, and finally crashes into a wall. She walks away unharmed.

In the first episode of *Macross Plus*, Isamu meets a girl at the air base (he's a pilot) and takes her for a zip on his cyberbike. After a close call with a truck, she screams, "Slow down, you bastard !!".

Through all the noise of the wind he smiles back, "Faster ? Ok !".

The need for just the right word, the correct action, the beat as Gibson put it, is evident in cyberpunk. In film it is even more crucial. The animators are forced to deal with the increased bandwidth that the film medium offers. Everything must be created, designed, and animated from scratch. Gibson and his contemporaries had it easy; these anime guys take the themes and ideas that are only hinted at in the novels and create a reality from them.