Faster is Better: Cyberpunk, Technology, and Information Exchange.
Alen Vitas

1\ cyberpunk: key works

fiction

William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986), *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), *Virtual Light* (1993), *Idoru* (1996), *All Tomorrow's Parties* (1999); *Burning Chrome* (1986)
Pat Cadigan, *Synners* (1991)
Rudy Rucker, *Software* (1982)
Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash* (1992)
Bruce Sterling, *Schismatrix* (1985), *Islands in the Net* (1988)
Bruce Sterling, ed., *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*. (1986)
Walter Jon Williams, *Hardwired* (1986)

film

Videodrome. dir. David Cronenberg. 1982.
Blade Runner. dir. Ridley Scott, 1982.
Robocop. dir. Paul Verhoeven, 1987.
Tetsuo: Iron Man; *Tetsuo II: Body Hammer*. dir. Shinya Tsukamoto, 1989; 1992.
Ghost in the Shell. dir. Mamoru Oshii, 1995.
Strange Days. dir. Kathryn Bigelow, 1995.
Matrix. dir. Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999.

2\ speed and information density in cyberpunk fiction

I scarcely knew how to put a book together, and this seems to me to account in large part for the work's supposed singularity. [...] Much of the cyberspace technology so beloved of VR enthusiasts arose from my impatience with figuring out how to write physical transitions; I wanted to be able to channel-zap. (Gibson 319)

Movement all the time: in plot, in theme, in style, and in syntax. Huge amounts of new information – neologisms, innovations, twists of plot, secreted levels of hierarchy – are carried along an incredibly swift stream of narrative. (Csicsery-Ronay 192)

Not everyone can read *Neuromancer*: its neologisms alienate the uninitiated reader – that's their function – while its unwavering intensity and the absence of traditional pacing exhaust even the dedicated. The work is best experienced as something other than narrative – poetry perhaps – so that the images may perform their estranging, disembodying functions. The reader must jack into *Neuromancer* – it's a novel for would-be cyberspace cowboys. (Bukatman 152)

3\ 'technoliteracy'

— Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. (Arthur C. Clarke)
— The ways of technology, like the ways of God, are awesome and mysterious. (Neil Postman)
— In order to beat the devil you must know his system. (David Porush)

To me it seems like there is a kind of a strange denial in a lot of our culture, about just how important science and technology have been this century. There's just an unwillingness to come to grips with it at all. [...] I think we need a way to encourage people to become smart users. (Neal Stephenson)

[Gibson] offers cyberpunk literacy, which is the art of constant movement and steady navigation within an endless matrix of indeterminate appearances (with an eye on the code that will transform it all), as perhaps the only mode of effective counterpolitics in a corrupt, completely commodified world. (Covino 38)

sources

Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1993.
William A. Covino, "Cyberpunk Literacy; or, Piety in the Sky." *Literacy Theory in the Age of the Internet.* Eds. Todd Taylor and Irene Ward. New York: Columbia UP, 1998.
Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., "Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism." *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Fiction.* Ed. Larry McCaffery. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1991. 182-193.
William Gibson, "Author's Afterword." *Neuromancer*. [new ed.] London: Harper, 1994. 318-320.
Andrew Leonard, "Deep Code." [An Interview with Neal Stephenson] www.salonmag.com/books/int/1999/05/19/stephenson/index.html
David Porush, The Soft Machine: Cybernetic Fiction. New York and London: Methuen, 1985.
Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology.*New York: Knopf, 1992.

EXAMPLES OF WILLIAM GIBSON'S STYLE

[1]

   And in the bloodlit dark behind his eyes, silver phosphenes boiling in from the edge of space, hypnagogic images jerking past like film compiled from random frames. Symbols, figures, faces, a blurred, fragmented mandala of visual information.
   Please, he prayed, *now* —
   A gray disk, the color of Chiba sky.
   Now —
   Disk beginning to rotate, faster, becoming a sphere of paler gray. Expanding —
   And flowed, flowered for him, fluid neon origami trick, the unfolding of his distanceless home, his country, transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity. (*Neuromancer* 68)

[2]

   Without moving his head, he raised his eyes and studied the reflection of the passing crowd.
   There.
   Behind sailors in short-sleeved khaki. Dark hair, mirrored glasses, dark clothing, slender...
   And gone.
   Then Case was running, bent low, dodging between bodies. (*Neuromancer* 23)

[3]

   Fluorescents came on as he crawled in.
   'Close the hatch real slow, friend. You still got that Saturday night special you rented from the waiter?'
   She sat with her back to the wall, at the far end of the coffin. She had her knees up, resting her wrists on them; the pepperbox muzzle of a flechette pistol emerged from her hands.
   'That you in the arcade?' He pulled the hatch down. 'Where's Linda?'
   'Hit that latch switch.'
   He did.
   'That your girl? Linda?'
   He nodded.
   'She's gone. Took your Hitachi. Real nervous kid. What about the gun, man?' She wore mirrored glasses. Her clothes were black, the heels of black boots deep in the temperfoam.
   [...]
   She shook her head. He realized that the glasses were surgically inset, sealing her sockets. The silver lenses seemed to grow from smooth pale skin above her cheekbones, framed by dark hair cut in a rough shag. The fingers curled around the fletcher were slender, white, tipped with polished burgundy. The nails looked artificial.
   [...]
   She held out her hands, palms up, the white fingers slightly spread, and with a barely audible click, ten double-edged, four-centimeter scalpel blades slid from their housings beneath the burgundy nails.
   She smiled. The blades slowly withdrew. (*Neuromancer* 36-7)

[4]

   When we breached the first gate, the bulk of her data vanished behind core-command ice, these walls we see as leagues of corridor, mazes of shadow. Five separate landlines spurted May Day signals to law firms, but the virus had already taken over the parameter ice. The glitch systems gobble the distress calls as our mimetic subprograms scan anything that hasn't been blanked by core command. ("Burning Chrome" 173)

[5]

   They set a slamhound on Turner's trail in New Delhi, slotted it to his pheromones and the color of his hair. It caught up with him on a street called Chadni Chauk and came scrambling for his rented BMW through a forest of bare brown legs and pedicab tires. Its core was a kilogram of recrystallized hexogene and flaked TNT.
   He didn't see it coming. The last he saw of India was the pink stucco façade of a place called the Khush-Oil Hotel. (*Count Zero* 9)

[6]

    They found Sublett fifteen feet from Gunhead. His face and hands were swelling like bright pink toy balloons and he seemed to be suffocating, Schonbrunn's Bosnian housekeeper having employed a product that contained xylene and chlorinated hydrocarbons to clean some crayon-marks off a bleached-oak end table. (*Virtual Light* 34)