Cyberpunk Cut-and-Paste Manifesto

Gareth Branwyn

What follows is a series of quotes and paraphrases taken from a variety of sources. Some have been "sampled" so many times that their origins (and authors) have been obscured; others you will clearly recognize. Be attentive to the fact that these statements slip back and forth between the two uses of "cyberpunk" (as a literary genre and as a real world subculture). No attempt has been made to clarify their original intent nor to put them in any order.

Sources sampled include *The Mirrorshades Anthology*, *Vague* #21 (the Cyberpunk issue), *Going Gaga* #5, and the *Mississippi Review* #47/48. The original authors include Bruce Sterling, John Shirley, William Gibson, Mark Downham and Gareth Branwyn.

Models are not true or false, they are more or less useful.

Cyberpunk is endless skimming.

Images, electronic continents, drift past the retina, moving towards pure surface. In cyberpunk, the real, the virtual, the imaginal, the artificial, the human and the machine (cyborg) are all seeking re-invention, re-definition. Our vast technological changes are shaping new forms of culture, social organization, and myth-making.

Cyberpunk is about technological implosion, miniaturization, and synaesthetic media.

Cyberpunk in the real world simply means the Do-It-Yourself attitude coupled with libertarian anarchist politics, projected 20 minutes into the future. It's "garage band" or rebel futurism.

Cyberpunk is characterized by :

- A global worldview.
- An identification with underground cultures.
- Influences outside of SF.

- Punk intensity.
- Influences from rock culture.
- Anti-heroes as heroes.
- Honesty in characterization.
- Information saturation/overload.
- An interest in body modification.
- A romance with electronic forms of "non-ordinary" reality (i.e. "cyberspace").
- An interest in anarchy, libertarianism, cultural terrorism.

"Cyber" and "punk" - the ideal post-modern couple : a machine philosophy that can create the world in its own image and a self-mutilating freedom, that is that image snarling back.

Cyberpunk reflects the increasingly pervasive influence of science fiction on post-modern culture - the moment when SF depicts the collapse of the future onto the present.

Cyberpunk deals increasingly with madness, more precisely with the most philosophically interesting phenomenon of madness : hallucination (derangement).

We are very quickly entering a world where the difference between fantasy and reality is difficult or impossible to distinguish. It is a globalized world pulsing with information flows and data commodities, a place where infinite sub-cultures and mind cults live in their own pocket universes.

Cyberpunk is an industrial myth of the near future, a new techno-surreal fiction.

Cyberpunk is a scrambled mass of referential fictions in search of an operational strategy for the living of life, which is increasingly experiencing slippage into the virtual technologies of the near future.

The real is leaking into the representational.

Cyberpunk attempts to demythologize the established cultural codes in order to decipher concealed strategies of domination, desire, will, power, and the will to power.

Cyberpunk is a radical interrogation of the technologies at work in contemporary society.

Cyberpunk is an interzone between hard technologies, the sciences, mysticism and nihilo-romantic surreality. Cyberpunk has a strong garage band aesthetic. It grapples with the raw core of our near future, its myths, its ideas, its coming practices. It is a pop culture which is theorizing itself into a more cohesive and self-determined existence.

The differences between the sciences and the humanities : the gulf between literary culture, the formal structures of art and politics and the culture of science, the world of science and engineering - it's all converging. Cyberpunk intuitively understands that technical culture is moving very fast. 95% of the political Left is thirty years behind this techno-convergence, and receding. The advances of science are deeply radical - potentially revolutionary even, if utilized appropriately. They are surging into the culture at large; they are invasive.

Certain central themes spring up repeatedly in cyberpunk. Firstly the theme of body invasion, prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. Secondly, mind invasion and mind expansion : brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry - all techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of self. For cyberpunk, the computer is much more than an object; it is also an icon and a metaphor that suggests new ways of thinking about ourselves and our new environments, new ways of constructing images of what it means to be human.

The technical revolution reshaping our society is based not in hierarchy but in decentralization, not in rigidity, but in fluidity.

In cyberpunk, geographical frontiers no longer exist and in their place are vast micro-electronic territories. One of the key roles of the expanding electronic information grid is to articulate a new social and geopolitical stratification based on the immediate access to data. The aim of cyberpunk is to create a state of temporary grid-lock in order to insert subversive messages of its own. Information, structured by automatic data processing, becomes a new type of raw material for the (post) industrial myths of the near future.

The street finds its own use for things. It's all in the mix.

- Information wants to be free.

- Access to computers and anything which may teach you something about how the world works should be unlimited and total.
- Always yield to the hands-on imperative.
- Mistrust Authority.
- Promote Decentralization.
- Do It Yourself.
- Fight the Power.
- Feed the noise back into the system.