The Future of Cyberpunk Criticism: Introduction to Transpacific Cyberpunk

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The genesis of cyberpunk criticism could well be dated to March 1987, when Stephen P. Brown inaugurated the first cyberpunk journal *Science Fiction Eye* together with his friend Daniel J. Steffan, with Paul DiFilippo, Elizabeth Hand, and myself as contributing editors. Of course, it is the impact of William Gibson's multiple-award-winning *Neuromancer* in 1984, featuring the anti-hero Case's adventures in what Gibson himself called "cyberspace," that aroused popular interest in the new style of speculative fiction. This surge of interest led Gibson's friend, writer Bruce Sterling, the editor of the legendary critical fanzine *Cheap Truth*, to serve as unofficial chairman of the brand-new movement. Thus, on 31 August 1985, the first cyberpunk panel took place at NASFiC (The North American Science Fiction Convention) in Austin, Texas, featuring writers in Sterling's circle: John Shirley, Lewis Shiner, Pat Cadigan, Greg Bear, and Rudy Rucker. As I was studying American literature at the graduate school of Cornell University during the mid-1980s, I was fortunate enough to witness this historical moment. After the panel, Sterling said, "Our time has come!" Thus, from the spring of 1986, I decided to conduct a series of interviews with cyberpunk writers, part of which are now easily available in Patrick A. Smith's edited *Conversations with William Gibson* (University Press of Mississippi 2014).

However, without Brown's plan in 1987 of publishing the new journal *Science Fiction Eye* focusing on cyberpunk criticism, my early interviews and articles could not have been published in their original form. It was in May 1986 at Disclave'86, the annual local science fiction convention held in the Washington D.C. area, that I could have my first interview with Gibson and come to know his close friend Steve Brown, who wanted me to get involved in his new project. Since then, Brown taught me everything he could about science fiction journalism. What is more, he provided me with whatever he found intriguing and necessary in this field. He sent me a copy of Jeanne Gomoll's monumental symposium on "Women in Science Fiction", featured in a fanzine called *Khatru* #3 and #4. It is true that the cyberpunk writer community is sometimes called another boys' club, with the exceptions of Pat Cadigan and Ellen Datlow, the legendary editor of the *OMNI* magazine who was nicknamed "the queen of cyberpunk." Nevertheless, Brown's editorship also opened up a heated discussion among feminist speculative fiction writers and critics such as Connie Willis, Pat Murphy, Karen Joy Fowler, Lucy Sussex, and Mari Kotani. Thus, the cyberpunk movement very naturally initiated me into the rise of cyborg feminism, as presaged by the proto-feminist and proto-cyberpunk writer James Tiptree, Jr in the 1970s, and firmly established by distinguished historian of science Donna Haraway of the University of California, Santa Cruz in the 1980s. At that point, I did not anticipate that Haraway's astonishing article "The Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) was to be admired in the 1990s as part of the canon of Cultural Studies. This article was first translated into Japanese by Mari Kotani and included in my edited book *Cyborg Feminism* (Treville 1991), along with the major African American speculative fictionist Samuel Delany's critique of Haraway, together with feminist heroic fantasy writer Jessica Amanda Salmonson's essay on Anne McCaffery's *The Ship Who Sang* (1969).

Thus, cyberpunk refreshed not only the science fiction criticism that had been cultivated by Anglo-American academic journals such as *Extrapolation*, *Foundation*, and *Science Fiction Studies*, but also critical theory as such in the wake of Franco-American structuralism, semiotics, and deconstruction,

championed by Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Michel Foucault, Paul de Man, and others. This is the reason why my friend Larry McCaffery of San Diego State University, the guru of Avant-Pop, included in his splendidly edited *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction* (Duke University Press 1991) not only hardcore cyberpunks but also postmodern theoreticians such as Jacques Derrida, Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, Arthur Kroker, Darko Suvin, and others. This casebook well deserves the name of the first academic collection of cyberpunk criticism that paved the way for critical theory to come in the age of the digital humanities.

In retrospect, since its inception in the early 1980s, which coincided with the dawn of the internet and the rise of computer hackers, the cyberpunk movement has had a tremendous impact on today's globalist literature and culture, ranging from manga and anime through to cinema. Bruce Sterling did not conceal his fascination with Japanese pop, such as the synthpop of Sandii and Sunsets. It is well known that William Gibson's 1980s Cyberspace Trilogy (*Neuromancer* [1984], *Count Zero* [1986], and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* [1988]), which explored the frontier of cyberspace, another name for the internet coined by the very author, was influenced not only by the punk rock of Lou Reed but also by the techno-pop of Yellow Magic Orchestra. Gibson's 1990s Bridge Trilogy (*Virtual Light* [1993], *Idoru* [1996], and *All Tomorrow's Parties* [1999]) featured a virtual idol, Rei Toei, who coincided with her real-life Japanese counterpart Kyoko Date, a 3D CG virtual girl developed by Hori Productions and without whom no AI Beauty, such as Hatsune Miku, could have been created in the heyday of Cool Japan here in the 21st century. While 1960s North American writers owed much to the counterculture developed on the West Coast, 1980s cyberpunks are more deeply indebted to transpacific negotiations.

By the same token, however, we should not neglect their extraterritorial status. While Bruce Sterling incorporated his childhood experience in India into his fiction and started to go back and forth between Texas and Europe since the 2000s, Gibson migrated in the mid-1970s from South Carolina to Toronto, Canada to evade the draft. Being a typical expatriate, Gibson put special emphasis upon the Lo-Tek (outlaw technologist) spirit of a post-countercultural tribe, which was to be shared by the punk kids Otomo describes in *Akira* and the human weapons that director Shinya Tsukamoto represents in his *TETSUO* trilogy (1989–2010). Tsukamoto, in turn, is one of the major inheritors of the "Japanese Apache" aesthetic created by Komatsu Sakyo, a Founding Father of Japanese science fiction in his first novel *Nippon Apacchi-zoku* (*The Japanese Apache* [1964]), as I detailed in *Full Metal Apache* (Duke UP 2006). A further descendant of cyberpunk could be found in Neil Blomkamp's South African post-cyberpunk film *District 9* (2009), in which the natives of Johannesburg and the miserable aliens lost in space turn out to have the Lo-Tek spirit in common.

Indeed, cyberpunk is not only a literary and (sub-)cultural subgenre optimistically celebrating the growth of high-technology, but it also embodies the neo-extraterritorial spirit of Lo-Tek tribes born out of the postmodern street. What matters now is that in this context, cyberpunk started gaining new significance not only in contemporary arts of representation but also in international/transnational critical theory.

As the guest editor of the special issue of *Arts* journal featuring "Cyberpunk in a Transnational Context," I feel very pleased to be able to present here a number of illuminating essays written by international authors who share my own interest in the future of critical theory.

Mike Mosher's (2018) "Some Aspects of Californian Cyberpunk" vividly reminds us of the influence of West Coast counterculture on cyberpunks, with special emphasis on 1960s theoretical gurus such as Timothy Leary and Marshall McLuhan, who explored the frontiers of inner space as well as the global village. Frenchy Lunning's (2018) "Cyberpunk Redux: Dérives in the Rich Sight of Post-Anthropocentric Visuality" examines how the heritage of Ridley Scott's techno-noir film *Blade Runner* (1982) that preceded Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) keeps revolutionizing the art of visuality, even in the age of the Anthropocene. If you read Lunning's essay along with Lidia Meras's (2018) "European Cyberpunk Cinema," which closely analyzes major European cyberpunkish dystopian films *Renaissance* (2006) and *Metropia* (2009) and Elana Gomel's (2018) "Recycled Distopias: Cyberpunk and the End of History," your understanding of the cinematic and post-utopian possibility of cyberpunk

will become more comprehensive. For a cutting-edge critique of cyberpunk manga, let me recommend Martin de la Iglesia's (2018) "Has *Akira* Always Been a Cyberpunk Comic?" which radically redefines the status of *Akira* (1982–1993) as trans-generic, paying attention to the genre consciousness of the contemporary readers of its Euro-American editions. Next, Denis Taillandier's (2018) "New Spaces for Old Motifs? The Virtual Worlds of Japanese Cyberpunk" interprets the significance of Japanese hardcore cyberpunk novels such as Goro Masaki's *Venus City* (1995) and Hirotaka Tobi's *Grandes Vacances* (2002; translated as *The Thousand Year Beach*, 2018) and *Ragged Girl* (2006), paying special attention to how the authors created their virtual landscape in a Japanese way. For a full discussion of William Gibson's works, please read Janine Tobek and Donald Jellerson's (2018) "Caring About the Past, Present, and Future in William Gibson's Pattern Recognition and Guerilla Games' Horizon: Zero Dawn" along with my own "Transpacific Cyberpunk: Transgeneric Interactions between Prose, Cinema, and Manga" (Tatsumi 2018). The former reconsiders the first novel of Gibson's new trilogy in the 21st century not as realistic but as participatory, and redefines its aesthetics with today's video game culture by renovating Walter Benjamin's philosophy. The latter relocates Gibson's essence not in cyberspace but in a junkyard, making the most of his post-Dada/Surrealistic aesthetics and "Lo-Tek" way of life, as is clear in the 1990s "Bridge" trilogy.

To sum up, this collection, which itself transgresses the boundaries between the literary and the visual, will undoubtedly provide you with the most concise introduction to cyberpunk criticism in the 21st century.

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