

Cyberpunk: the new frontier?

Fusion of man and machine becomes fast-growing trend in science-fiction world

"Living in the Future"

with Sam Kepfield

Is cyberpunk for real? If so, what is it?

"Cyberpunk" is a new addition to the English language, coined in the middle of the last decade. It hasn't made it into the Webster's Dictionaries we use here at the office. Maybe by the turn of the century "Cyberpunk" will grace the pages of the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Cyberpunk is generally acknowledged to have its roots in William Gibson's 1984 novel "Neuromancer," which went on to win the Hugo, Nebula and Phillip K. Dick Awards. Oddly enough, Gibson denies that the movement he supposedly birthed exists. Gardner Dozois, now editor of Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, coined the term when he referred to Gibson and fellow authors Bruce Sterling, Lewis Shiner and John Shirley as "cyberpunks."

The grammatical roots are easy enough to decipher. "Cyber-" comes from "cybernetics," the science of studying complex electronic systems and similar organic control systems. "-punk" ought to be obvious, denoting an anarchic, hooliganistic attitude.

The central idea behind cyberpunk is the melding of man and machine, blurring the line between carbon and silicon.

Brain implants, allowing one to access a

computer by jacking directly into the skull, will be common.

Coming from the other end of the evolutionary ladder, cyberpunks foresee (and they are not alone) computers that are, for all practical purposes, intelligent life forms — HAL 9000 move over!

Once you get into a computer, you're in "cyberspace" (a term that Gibson invented). It's hard to explain, but remember the 1982 movie "Tron" and you get the idea.

Technically, any time you use E-mail or a computer wire service, you're in cyberspace. To cyberpunks, the term goes beyond just being user-friendly.

Just as the western had cowboys as its heroes, so cyberpunk has computer cowboys riding the ranges inside worldwide computer nets, hitting and raiding data banks for information — all without leaving the comfort of their homes.

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Virtual Reality allows a person to experience far-off or imaginary worlds (as in "The Lawnmower Man.")

Virtual Sex, the ultimate in safe sex, is around the corner — fit yourself with a tight bodysuit woven with sensors, dial up your partner a continent away, and reach out and touch someone.

VR porn and erotica, featuring such sirens as Virtual Valerie, are already available.

Cyberpunk is more than mere machinery, though, it's attitude. — Sid Vicious behind a

Cray YM computer.

Cyberpunk has inspired its own music, called "industrial," which is just what it sounds like, a cacophony of electronic and machine noise.

Along with the music come drugs, and Ecstasy is the drug of choice. Smart drugs, which supposedly boost intelligence, come in a close second.

One place to get a good look at cyberpunk culture is the new magazine "Mondo 2000." Peruse its pages, and you will either be fascinated or horrified.

Between straight-science articles bearing titles such as "At Play in the Unified Field," the reader is treated to manifestations of an upside-down culture. "The Grace Jones School for Girls," an assertiveness-training seminar for female computer nerds, swaps sexual identity about as readily as one would change their socks.

Interviews with musical artists such as KRS-One, Mondo Vanilli, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers are featured side by side with book reviews on techno-culture.

Illustrations range from computer-generated digital artwork, to a painting of Captain Kirk and Mister Spock engaged in an act which is outlawed in most of the states, and would have them cashiered in today's military.

"Mondo 2000," like cyberpunk itself, is an intriguing blend of the conventional Scientific American brand of gee-whiz techno-worship, and the downright disturbing and bizarre, breaking down social conventions and norms. It perfectly capsulizes cyberpunk's strange attraction. Look it in the face and you may see civilization's salvation, or its ultimate ruin.

CON NOTE: On Sunday, April 4, from noon to 5 p.m., the Omaha Marriott will host Trekon, a gathering for Star Trek and SF buffs. Special guest will be John De Lancie, "Q" of Star Trek: The Next Generation. Tickets are \$15 at the door, \$5 for children.

Sam Kepfield is an A & E columnist, but not a cyberpunk, having reached a respectable old age.



Courtesy of Mondo 2000

Mondo 2000

Mondo 2000 offers readers look at non-material world

Mondo 2000, recently featured in Time, exists for some of us as an Nth dimensional peephole into the backroom show that is the future.

For those of us who lust for that future, Mondo offers us a vision of the world dematerialized at last.

Mondo is a magazine, but it's more: a reframing of reality.

Sampled to death and beyond, the Digital Universe (Digiverse) as represented in M2 is recombinant and multidimensional, layered with memeing.

Memes are the "sound bites" of meaning. Meaning is constantly being broken down in the accelerator of time into component parts — and recombined to create new memeing: other meaning — other reality.

We are no longer living in the present. Copies of M2 are available in town if you know where to look.

— Mark Baldrige

International movie beautifully portrays survival of hardship

Stranded crew learns to adapt to new culture



Courtesy of Concorde Films

A conquistador from "Cabeza de Vaca."

Mary Riepma Ross
Film Theater

Forget "Lord of the Flies" and "Last of the Mohicans." Forget the movie versions, anyway. Nicolas Echevarria's "Cabeza de Vaca" goes straight to the heart of inhumanity and the ability of the individual to survive hardship and adapt

to other cultures.

Set at the beginning of the 16th century, the movie begins with the sinking of a Spanish ship headed for the New World. Split between two life rafts, the surviving crew drifts at sea until one raft hits land.

The survivors (a group of soldiers, a priest and a slave) find themselves in a hostile land filled with sorcery. After discovering a fetish of blood and bone and a mutilated body, the group gets promptly struck down by arrows and spears.

The few who remain alive are taken captive and caged. The captors remove Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca (Juan Diego), apparently for their main course, but instead take him to an Indian mystic and his companion, an armless dwarf.

Initially used as a slave, Alvar eventually comes to attain the powerful magic of the mystic. He realizes he has been chosen as a healer.

By the time we realize Alvar as a Christ figure, he and his band are found by armored conquistadors. Alvar then finds that civilization poses challenges to his transformed ideas of spiritual faith.

"Cabeza de Vaca," intensely beautiful in a "National Geographic" sort of way, is frequently gruesome and vibrates with hallucinatory color.

"Cabeza de Vaca" is showing at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater Sunday as part of the UPC International Film series. Screenings are at 2:30, 4:45, 7 and 9:15 p.m.

— Calvin Clinchard



Courtesy of Blue Eagle Booking

Howard "Louie Blue" Armstrong and Nat Reese play the Lied Sunday.

Blues musicians to take stage Sunday

The combination of banjo, guitar and voice can produce a style of music that has seemed to disappear with the times.

Howard Armstrong and Nat Reese, longtime musicians, will bring back the lost tradition of "old blues" music with their performance at the Lied Center for Performing Arts' Johnny Carson Theater Sunday.

Both musicians have influenced the blues world for more than 40

years, touring extensively for most of their careers. Howard "Louie Blue" Armstrong, 80, is one of the world's most versatile musicians and plays almost any instrument with strings. He has been named a National Heritage Fellow by the National Endowment for the Arts, America's most prestigious recognition of its traditional art forms and its progenitors.

Nat Reese, 61, is known for playing a mixture of different types of

music: jazz, swing, country and the blues.

About six years ago, the two started touring together after they realized people liked the "old blues" way they played.

Half-price tickets are available for students at the Lied Center Box Office. Reservations for the 8 p.m. performance are strongly suggested because seating is open and limited.

— Sarah Duey

Diary of a Madman

David Badders/DN

