Chapter 4 — A Fantasy Theme Analysis of The Difference Engine

Introduction

In this chapter I will first discuss the culture of science fiction and its historical reliance on technology. I will then outline the elements of the Cyberpunk culture — to show it as an offshoot of the superordinate science fiction culture and outline both what it shares with that culture and what elements make it unique from that culture. Briefly, I will contrast these elements with the subgenre of Steampunk, including special emphasis on the literary affectations that supposedly qualify a work as Steampunk.

After outlining the elements of the three cultures involved, I will then discuss *The Difference Engine*, its place in the hierarchy of science fiction novels, the authors standing within the culture, and the purpose of *The Difference Engine* as a rhetorical act aimed at the three interrelated culture: science fiction, Cyberpunk and Steampunk. I will show that Gibson and Sterling are reaffirming fantasies within their core culture while at the same time criticizing aspects of that culture — in short, that Gibson and Sterling hoped *The Difference Engine* would both reaffirm the authors' favored cultural fantasies while at the same time criticizing disfavored fantasies. Using Fantasy Theme Analysis, I will discuss the treatment of various rhetorical visions, both favored and disfavored, as they are treated in *The Difference Engine*, and through this analysis determine the extent of Gibson and Sterling's rhetorical acts as applied to the three cultures, and the ultimate failure of the act as an effective alteration of the cultures' overall rhetorical vision.

The Culture of Science Fiction

The culture of science fiction literature is inextricably tied to its continued emphasis on two themes: the future and technology. How those themes are treated at various times within the history of the culture is, however, why there are numerous "epochs" within science fiction. These epochs are times in which the overall tone and artistic sensibility of the cultural literature (and, subsequently, the cultural vision, the sense-making strata, of the culture) differed, often radically, from the previous periods.

Often, these epochs coincide with periods of North American and Western European social upheaval. The literary stylizing and fascination with the "soft" sciences characterized by The New Wave is coincidental with the social convulsion brought on by the events of the early 1960s to mid-1970s. Although these types of inter-generational rebellions have taken place roughly every 25 years presumably throughout history, science fiction literature has historically been very susceptible to and reflective of societal change.

But this can be seen as an effect on all literature, and on all cultures. What is it about the culture of science fiction — which deals with the future, technology, and is primarily literary — that makes it different? According to Broderick (1995), " . . . one crucial factor is that SF is written in a kind of code (on top of and sometimes displacing all other codes of writing) which has to be learned by apprenticeship. This necessity, of course, merely intensifies the skeptics' bewilderment at the trouble taken by those who learn it in the first place" (p. xii). In addition to this, there is a set of rules — literary/cultural precepts, handed

down through the texts — which must also be absorbed by the individual to become a member "in full standing" of the science fiction culture. Broderick continues:

> No doubt this is true to an extent in all genres, but the coding in SF text depends importantly on access to an unusually concentrated 'encyclopedia' — a mega-text of imaginary worlds, tropes, tools, lexicons, even grammatical innovations borrowed from other textualities. The enormously ramified intertextuality of SF makes it a specialized mode. For a story to be SF, it is insufficient for a writer to invoke, say, futuristic or extraterrestrial locales. The narrative-technical constraints of what has been done before by acknowledged SF writers are crucially important (so that Paul Theroux's O-Zone, say, reads to the knowing eye more as a clumsy parody of an unfamiliar genre than an example of it). (p. xiii)

Broderick's mega-text, taken in this context, seems to be the functioning template for the science fiction culture's rhetorical vision for both the mores of the community and the rules concerning what new rhetorical visions can be introduced. The parameters of the culture are deduced from this text, which is in turn comprised of the science fiction literature.

So, to become a member of the science fiction culture, it is necessary to familiarize oneself with the mega-text of the culture. As with Broderick's example of Theroux, to mimic the literary stylistic conventions of the culture does not necessarily make either the rhetor or the rhetorical act "of the science fiction culture." The literature, therefore, takes precedence over the members.

This is not to say, however, that the texts have no overriding modifiers. In fact, the opposite is true: science fiction generates a culture

unto itself principally due to the overriding modifiers on its texts. Primarily, as mentioned above, the modifiers extend, often concurrently, in two directions: technology (scientific) and the future (and what it will bring).

Broderick (1995) states that the fields of science and fiction are themselves not culturally far apart. "[T]he ultimate cosmos of science is not far removed from the microcosms of literature . . . and within the domain of fiction . . . the fabrications of science are not so far removed from the fantasies of literary — or, beyond the self-consciously literary, the traditional and popular — imagination" (p. 24). Close then, not only to science, but to cosmology as well, Broderick asserts. Similarly, that science fiction is based primarily in traditional myth echoes Bormann's (1972) contention that mythological/cultural archetypes figure prominently in fantasy generation.

Nicholls (1978) also discusses the relationship of science fiction to myth. "It is the great modern literature of metaphor. Conventional literature has a limit, set by everyday realism, to the juxtapositions of imagery it can allow itself. Science fiction . . . is able to incorporate intellectually *shocking* material, partly because it is so preeminently the literature of change, as opposed to mainstream literature, which is the literature of human continuity . . . it is the literature of the outsider, in the extreme sense" (p. 107). By this, Nicholls is not only reaffirming Broderick's point, but also adding another element. To Nicholls, science fiction is " . . . the literature of change" because, in one aspect, it is separated from the temporal continuum. Thematically, science fiction is future-oriented, forward looking in a fashion that other genres cannot be. At the same time, science

fiction is, as Broderick states, mythological. This aspect of science fiction helps it to stand on its own as a rhetorical vision, a way of negotiating the literary reality of the fantastic as well as of the timeless.

Broderick (1995) agrees:

> The social world we inhabit in the 20th century — especially at this its close, the close indeed of a millennium which, in its turning, figures 'the future' with tall the terror and delight of discontinuity — is a world in profound internal rupture. Like the heat that drives the crustal plates across the globe, science works invisibly and ineluctably, brought to awareness for most of us only in abrupt quakes or vulcanisms. Even those people who live modestly, eschewing the spectacular, are participants in epistemic rift. Science fiction, Delany remarks: " . . .Is no more a collection of themes than it is a collection of rhetorical devices . . . it is a set of questions we expect to be answered about the relation of the word and the world, character and concept, fictive world and given world; and any given SF text can foil or fulfill those expectations in an infinite number of ways." (pp. 47-48)

And, later: "Yet on the face of it the process of decoding an SF text works by the same general principals of operation as any other reading" (p. 59). By this I take Broderick to mean that, since (1) science fiction is " . . . the literature of change," and (2) the post-modern cultural landscape contributes to increasing cultural change, the conclusion is that this period in history is the most culturally volatile in history. Subsequently, science fiction of all genres, by addressing that cultural and temporal volatility, addresses most directly the cultural difficulties of the age. This epoch of science fiction, then, is at once the most recursive and the most pertinent. The mega-text Broderick describes, then, would therefore contain elements designed to aid participants in the science fiction culture in negotiating an acceptable reality. The mega-

text, consequently, serves as a template for the rhetorical vision of the science fiction culture as a whole.

Brooke-Rose (1981) states that " . . .the realistic narrative is hitched to a mega-story (history, geography), itself valorized, which doubles and illuminates it, creating expectations on the line of least resistance through a text already known, usually as close as possible to the reader's experience. Exoticism is reduced to the familiar. This gives points of anchorage, allows an economy of description and insures a general effect of the real that transcends any actual decoding since the references are not so much understood as simply recognized as proper names" (p. 243). When considered in the light of Bormann's (1972) assertion that fantasies are fabricated and accepted to enable cultures to negotiate particular confusing or prone-to-change realities, " . . . a point of anchorage" becomes that much more essential to a culture. This point not only is "close" to the reader's experience, it helps to negotiate that experience into acceptable experiential "units," whereby the experience, confusing as it is, is broken down into more accommodating parts.

"Regrettably, [Brooke-Rose] blurs her most telling insight, slighting SF's own distinctive mega-text," states Broderick (1995). "The function of any parallel story is to evoke shared verities and commonplaces (however provisional and arbitrary these might be from a standpoint of a deconstructive critic, cultural relativist, or epistemological anarchist), providing behind every item in a syntagm a certified and secure paradigm of reference" (p. 59). This emphasizes the mythological base of the science fiction mega-text. This, in turn, adds to the culture's ability to distill effective and operational rhetorical visions from the greater mega-text. This

echoes Bormann's (1996) Principle of Imitation with regard to the creation and implementation of rhetorical visions: "The principle of imitation asserts that, with boredom or confusion, people begin to share fantasies that give some old familiar dramas a new production" (p. 5). This indicates what King (1981), Stevens (1996) and, to a lesser extent, McCaffery (1991a) have said is applicable here: That in many ways science fiction is thematically conservative. Despite its future-orientation, science fiction is primarily a *reaction* to rapid cultural and societal change, mostly technologically based change. In light of this, science fiction would have to be concerned fundamentally with technology and its effects. In short, science fiction reacts to societal and cultural change, creating a mega-text from which to draw rhetorically satisfying visions through which to negotiate incongruent and rapidly changing experience. These visions, and the fantasy types that make them up, are later integrated into the primary mega-text.

Brooke-Rose (1981) seems to agree, that science fiction:

> . . . usually creates a fictional historico-geographico-sociological mega-text but leaves it relatively vague, concentrating on technological marvels. Thus, Tolkien's fantasy compensates for this lack of external referentially by providing its own lumbering mega-text: [*The Lord of the Rings*] is like SF but more so, is particularly interesting in that there is such a mega-text, not pre-existent but entirely invented, yet treated with the utmost seriousness and in great detail, this destroying the element of recognition and enhance readability which this feature provides in the realistic novel, and causing on the contrary a plethora of information and the collapse of the referential code . . . (p. 243)

It is not only the readers of Tolkien who incorporate the mega-text and use it for the determining of referents for otherwise seemingly non-

sensical jargon, but the culture of science fiction as well. In the latter case, the mega-text is not contained in a single book or series, but is within the entire genre catalogue, which provides an ongoing series of referential material for the culture to use in determining the scope and nature of the cultural reality as well as a template for the construction/addition of new material, which is then similarly incorporated into the mega-text and becomes, over time, a part of the template for the next series of texts. The culture of science fiction, much like any large, superordinate culture, is far too great to describe with any degree of accuracy. The nature of the mega-text that encompasses the culture contributes to this as well — broad and diverse, the science fiction literature of such nature so as to incorporate wildly divergent cultural precepts, even down to the basal philosophical element of whether or not "technology" is "beneficial" to "mankind." Huxley (1932), for example, and Heinlein (1961), occupy theoretical antipodes on this subject. However, they might very well agree in this example on the question of whether modern democracy is effective and just. What can be determined, however, is that the members of the science fiction culture are members due to their familiarity with the mega-text of the culture itself; that this familiarity is gained only by the periodic and continual reading of culturally-satisfying texts; and that to gain access to the mega-text, a certain set of philosophical predispositions must exist within the prospective member.

The Cyberpunk Culture

Much of the reason a certain genre of fiction is classified as one "type" or another is due to the rhetorical vision it represents and pro-

poses. The Cyberpunks were no exception to this rule. In fact, it is with the Cyberpunks, caught up as they are with the computer technology, the Internet and virtual reality, that the computerized culture has found a literary proponent of its cultural ideals. Although science fiction has always been technical, and associated with technical cultures, the Cyberpunks are especially prone to negotiating their particular rhetorical vision through their fictional styles due to (1) the syncretic nature of the fiction itself, and (2) the new cultures associated with the new computerized communicative media. The syncretic nature of the Cyberpunks has already been discussed above, but it should not be discounted in the study of Cyberpunk rhetoric. The Cyberpunk "tent," large as it is, functioned much like a clearinghouse of science fiction ideology, and mainly typically non-Cyberpunk members of the science fiction cultures in America were subsumed under the rubric of Cyberpunk. Part of this was due to its popularity. The Cyberpunks were far more popular with the typical science fiction readership than, say, the New Wave writers, despite their expansion of the parameters of the genre (Clute, 1995). The New Wave writers were more talented than the Cyberpunks, but it is the Cyberpunks to whom the readership of science fiction finally looked for the promulgation of their rhetorical vision.

In many ways, the Cyberpunks, both culturally and textually, were integrally caught up with synthesis. They were recursive, and their future, as portrayed, was far more immediate than that of any science fiction epoch that had gone before.

> Cyberpunk was written by a generation of authors once-removed from the 1960s New Wave innovators,

> and this ten- and fifteen-year age difference was evident in their work in several ways. (The same point can be made about the differences between the 'mainstream' innovators of the 1960s [Coover, Barth and Gass] and their 1980s counterparts [Leyner, Vollmann and Ann Beattie].) For one thing, the Cyberpunks were the first generation of artists for whom the technologies of satellite dishes, video and audio players and recorders, computers and video games (both of particular importance), digital watches, and MTV were not exoticisms, but part of the daily 'reality matrix.' They were also the first generation of writers who were reading Thomas Pynchon, Ballard, and Burroughs as teenagers, who had grown up immersed in technology but also in pop culture, in the values and aesthetics of the counterculture associated with the drug culture, punk rock, video games, Heavy Metal comic books, David Cronenberg and Ridley Scott. (McCaffery, 1991b, p. 11)

Synthesis is a primary cultural trait for the Cyberpunks — synthesis not only of literary ideal, but also of cultural aspects. The nature of computerized culture, and the primary members within it, also altered the reality negotiation of the Cyberpunk culture. The Cyberpunks were intimately bound up with that of computerized culture; computerized culture is intimately bound to the rise of the Internet. Before the introduction of the Internet as a personal medium for communication, the computerized culture in many ways was the culture of science — segregated, technically superior, and misunderstood, an offshoot, though a valued one, of society at large. Once popularized, the Internet altered the culture of computers irrevocably. And, as science fiction has traditionally drawn its themes from the culture of science and technology, the elements now present in the 'host' culture were similarly drawn into the symbiote. Thus, as will be discussed later, within the rhetori-

cal vision of the Cyberpunks we find a large portion of traditional science fiction readership culture, but also something more, a more popular emphasis, and a consideration of technology not only for its power, but for its application, and theme often not seen prior to the New Wave writers.

Even so, this effect is contrasted by Cyberpunk's own recursive stance. McHale (1992) states that " . . .only in the context of the internal history of the SF genre do Cyberpunk's themes and styles acquire their full significance . . . I want to argue that the SF tradition is not the only relevant context for Cyberpunk, and that, on the contrary, part of Cyberpunk's significance derives from the changing relationship between SF and 'mainstream' fiction in recent decades. For SF is not a genre in a vacuum, of course, but belongs to an entire system of genres, popular entertainment genres as well as high art genres, with the overall system of systems, or polysystem, of culture" (in Slusser & Shippey, 1992, p. 312). This correlates with the assertions of Broderick (1995) and Brook-Rose (1981): Cyberpunk is an effective and active part of the science fiction mega-text. Reacting to the rapidity of cultural and technological change occurring at the time, Cyberpunk's recursive elements are analogous to the mythological elements of the science fiction mega-text, except that the "myths" to which Cyberpunk looks toward are (1) far nearer in time to the culture itself, and (2) primarily made up of pop culture artifacts. When McHale discusses the " . . . changing relationship between SF and 'mainstream' literature," he is commenting on the continuing facility with which science fiction reacts and responds to an increasing amount of technologically induced cultural change, a response seen to a far less degree in the

more "realistic" fictional genres.

At the same time, it was the culture's appearance to outsiders rather than its integral aspects that was of primary concern to the Cyberpunks. "In their works and in numerous, highly contentious public debates that took place at SF conferences and conventions, the Cyberpunks presented themselves as 'techno-urban-guerilla' artists announcing that both the technological dream and nightmares envisioned by the previous generations of SF artists were already in place, an that writers as well as the general public needed to create ways of using this technology for our own purposes before we all became mere software, easily deletable from the hard drives of multinationalism's vast mainframe" (McCaffery, 1991a, p. 11) "Cyberpunk authors constructed works that moved seamlessly through the realms of hard science and pop culture, realms that included chaos theory and Madonna, dada and punk rock, MTV and *film noir*, Arthur Rimbaud and Lou Reed, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Oliver North, instant re-runs and AI [Artificial Intelligence]. Decked out in mirrorshades and leather jackets, the Cyberpunks projected an image of confrontational "reality hacker" artist who were armed, dangerous and jacked into (but not under the thumb of) the now and the new" (p. 12). So, as McCaffery states, the Cyberpunk culture was made up of parts taken from other cultures and put to new uses. The cultural image portrayed by the Cyberpunks mirrored that which they portrayed in their texts, where "the street found its own uses for things," (discussed in more detail later), both the authors and readers of Cyberpunk, the cultural membership, found uses for cultural things, and modified these elements to fit a internal, textually-based worldview. As many of the

elements that McCaffery uses to describe Cyberpunk, many can be seen as contemporary compared to the time in which Cyberpunk was most popular. As with their texts, Cyberpunk was more about unification than anything, the synthesis of past cultural artifacts and future-oriented technological applicability.

There are, according to science fiction scholar Istvan Csicery-Ronay (1988), other syncretic aspects of Cyberpunk culture — aspects that highlight what Csicery-Ronay states are inherent in the postmodern philosophical stance of Cyberpunk. "As a label, 'Cyberpunk' is perfection. It suggests the apotheosis of post-modernism. On the one hand, pure negation: of manners, history, philosophy, politics, body, will, affect, anything mediated by cultural memory; on the other, pure attitude: all is power, and 'subculture,' and the grace of Hip negotiating the splatter of consciousness as it slams against the hard-tech future" (p. 182). Csicery-Ronay's point: in addition to unifying the science fiction of previous epochs with the technological environment of the present to extrapolate a valid and archetypal future, Cyberpunk also unifies the formerly antagonistic cultural precepts of "punk" and "hip" or, as Csicery-Ronay terms them, of negation and attitude. "Cyber/punk" is, according to Csicery-Ronay, " . . . the ideal postmodern couple: a machine philosophy that can create the world in its own image and a self-mutilating freedom, that is that image snarling back" (p. 186). At the same time, " . . .hipness is all" (p. 184). The result, states Csicery-Ronay: "Cyberpunk artists . . . aren't concerned with the implications of cybernetic knowledge for knowledge and identity — the dizzying process of constructing a self — or the philosophical problems of imagining a truly

artificial intelligence. For the one thing that Cyberpunk is fascinated with above all else, its ruling deity, is sleaze" (p. 193). "Cyber" from Wiener's "cybernetics," the coupling of man and machine, a highly integrative concept, as Csicery-Ronay claims; "punk" from the 1980s counter-cultural movement, fetishistic and negative. Csicery-Ronay's allusion that Cyberpunk is the perfect "label" for this literary culture is accurate, for it circumscribes the contradiction inherent in the genre and the subsequent application of that contradiction to the culture itself, connecting it with the post-modern ethos.

As examples of this contradiction, Cyberpunk texts are often dubious in their attitudes toward the technology they, on the surface, seem to embrace. Hollinger (in Slusser & Shippey, 1992) states: "Cyberpunk . . . was nevertheless at times brilliantly innovative in its explorations of technology . . . from this perspective, Cyberpunk can be situated among the growing (although still relatively small) number of SF projects which can be identified as 'anti-humanist" (p. 204). It is here that the relationship between the culture and the cultural mega-text are reinforced. McCaffery (1991b) states Gibson's attitudes toward technology: "My feelings about technology are totally ambivalent — which seems to me to be the only way to relate to what's happening today. When I write about technology, I write about how it has already affected our lives; I don't extrapolate in the way I was taught an SF writer should." Later, Gibson clarifies his position: "My aim isn't to provide specific predictions or judgements so much as to find a suitable fictional context in which to examine the very mixed blessings of technology" (p. 274, italics in text).

This is a telling point: Cyberpunk, perceived as technophiliac, has a great deal of anti-technological content, a reaction to presently occurring cultural change. Of recent epochs in science fiction, this indicates that Cyberpunk's recursive elements and integrative content marks it as the latest in a continuing series of successively more reactionary movements in science fiction. As the rapidity of techno-cultural change has increased, we begin to see the curve of conservatism within science fiction, from Golden Age to New Wave to Cyberpunk. Each subgenre reacted and fed back into the previous literature. But the Cyberpunk reaction comes closest to the reality of the technological-cultural landscape, in that the cultural ambivalence to technology exacerbates the rate of change attributed to that technology. For the Cyberpunks, rapidity of cultural change is for the first time a constant societal presence. Cyberpunk therefore cannot, unlike previous science fiction genres, warn against technology's cultural encroachment or embrace the beneficial aspects of technology as an overall cultural good. Rather, Cyberpunk literature is forced to treat technology with the ambivalence that society ultimately has attached to it. Conversely, technology has, through Cyberpunk, cast off the normative values that had previously been assimilated into it and become perceptively more "tool"-like — contributing to increasing cultural change, but morally neutral. This moral neutrality pervades the Cyberpunk culture.

The Cyberpunk Rhetorical Vision

The Cyberpunk culture and the texts that accompany it can be considered Gibson and Sterling's home of sorts — both men are par-

tially responsible for the formation of the subculture, both authors' works are typically seen as visions of the subculture, and both are seen as primary constructors of the culture's overall rhetorical vision. And, in many ways, *The Difference Engine* is a reiteration of themes that have appeared in prior Cyberpunk texts.

The entire body of the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision cannot be explicated in total. Like even the smallest of cultures, the sheer complexity of the vision prevents explication in entirety. However, a number of fantasy types found in the Cyberpunk culture are similarly found in *The Difference Engine*.

As stated above, as a theme is introduced and reiterated, it is repeated enough, in a variety of ways, to be considered a *fantasy type*. Fantasy types are repeated across both individual lines within the culture — the sharing and negotiation discussed above — and across cultural lines, resulting in certain fantasy types taking on, over time, archetypal characteristics. The Cyberpunk rhetorical vision is made up of six concomitant fantasy types, weaving together to form a cohesive cultural outlook:

(1) People find uses for technology not originally planned during the development of that technology.

(2) The personal archetype (*ethos*) is that of the Hacker.

(3) The lines between Man and Machine are becoming indistinct.

(4) The geographical archetype (*topos*) is that of the Inter zone, locales where Hybridization takes place.

(5) "American the Fallen."

(6) The signifying/presentation archetype (*logos*) is that of the Mirrorshades.

These fantasy types are found throughout the body of Cyberpunk texts and have been subsequently inculcated into the culture as components of the overall Cyberpunk rhetorical vision. Similarly, aspects of these types can be found in *The Difference Engine*. However, caught up in all the fantasy types is the Cyberpunk culture's concept of Technology. To use the term "Technology," with the capital "T," is perhaps a misrepresentation of the significance of the Cyberpunk vision's fantasy types. The Cyberpunk culture, integrative and counterculturally oriented as it is, is not concerned with "T"echnology in the sense that other science fiction rhetorical visions are. Rather, Cyberpunk fantasies concerning technology are modified by the overall rhetorical vision as it was developed in the greater cultural and temporal environment. On one hand, the Cyberpunks are intimately bound to the more recent computer and communications technologies, most notably the Internet. Computer, Internet and telecommunications technologies were experiencing remarkable advances in the late-1970s and early 1980s, and were more significant to the Cyberpunk vision than, say, the technologies of Edison, Norbert Wiener or even Buckminster Fuller. The Cyberpunk fantasy types embody this relationship. The Hacker fantasy archetype is a product of both computer and telephone technology, a direct descendant of the "phone phreaks" that are described in Sterling's (1992) nonfiction *The Hacker Crackdown*. The greater cultural environment, including the science fiction culture, was reacting to the influences of

these technologies, and the Cyberpunk vision, in its consciousness creating stage (see Bormann, 1972), integrated these technologies into its fantasies. Subsequently, it is with computers and telecommunications that the Cyberpunks are concerned with, and to which the elements that make up the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision directly relate.

For another, the Cyberpunk vision is concerned more with technological application than Technological theory, and the fantasy type of the "street finding its own uses for things" epitomizes this. The Cyberpunk rhetorical vision and the fantasies that comprise it have little to do with theoretical underpinnings. Rather, the Cyberpunks are "use"-directed and application-oriented. This is partly in reaction to the science fiction cultures that came immediately before the Cyberpunks — the Golden Age and the New Wave — who were in many ways less concerned with applications than they were overall effects. But mostly the Cyberpunk culture is application-oriented due to (1) a lack of intellectual or theoretical subtext in the seminal Cyberpunk texts, and (2) the literary connections the genre has to the pulp fiction thrillers of the 1940s and 1950s. On one side, the Cyberpunk texts emphasize "getting things done." Beauvoir, one of Bobby's mentors in *Count Zero* (Gibson, 1986a), refers to his religion in this fashion:

> "It isn't concerned with notions of salvation or transcendence. What it's about is *getting things done*. You follow me? In our system, there are many gods, many spirits. Part of one big family, with all the virtues, all the vices. There's a ritual traditional of communal manifestation, understand? Vodou says, there's God, sure, Gran Met, but He's big, too big and too far away to worry himself if your ass is poor or if you can't get laid. Come on, man, you know how this

> works, it's *street* religion, came out a dirt poor place a million years ago. Vodou's like the street. Some duster chops out your sister, you don't go camp on the Yakuza's doorstep, do you? No way. You go to somebody, though, who can get things *done*, right?"

And later:

> "So," Beauvoir said. "We are concerned with getting things done. If you want, we are concerned with systems. And so are you, or at least you want to be, or else you wouldn't be a cowboy and you wouldn't have a handle, right?" (p. 77, italics in text)

Gibson is outlining the Cyberpunk attitude toward technology here. The Cyberpunk vision isn't concerned with Technology, or " . . . camping out on the Yakuza's doorstep." Applications are the Cyberpunk technological stock. At the same time, the literary connections that Cyberpunk protagonists have with the pulp fiction thriller similarly affect the Cyberpunk vision. The pulp fiction protagonist was tough, a loner, and unconcerned with intellectualism. The Cyberpunk texts tend to mimic these characterizations, and subsequently the fantasies incorporated into the Cyberpunk vision similarly hold these characteristics in esteem. In short, the word "technology" is used in a different textual environment for the Cyberpunks than it is for other cultures, and that environment is maintained in this study. The word technology, as used below, should be understood to reflect the Cyberpunk cultural environment.

The Street Finds Its Own Uses

The first fantasy type is that "The street finds its own uses for

things" — a theme I would alter in this way: The street and, most importantly, *the people of the street*, find uses for technology that cannot be anticipated during the development of that technology. In the case of Cyberpunk literature, this theme has been iterated from the very beginning. In *Burning Chrome*, in the short story of the same name, one of the protagonists recalls an occasion when, after a breakup with a girlfriend, he ingests both alcohol and a drug called Vasopressin, which Gibson writes is used primarily for Alzheimer's Disease patients. "Booze and Vasopressin are the ultimate in masochistic pharmacology," the character explains. "The juice makes you maudlin and the Vasopressin makes you remember, I mean really remember. Clinically they use the stuff to counter senile amnesia, but the street finds its own uses for things" (p. 186). Other examples abound in the Cyberpunk texts — in *Neuromancer* and *Count Zero* (Gibson, 1984 & 1986a), the Finn embodies this concept by altering and selling illegal technology to Case, Bobby and numerous other characters. In *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (Gibson, 1993), the protagonist Slick Henry constructs his artistic sculptures directly from old machinery, a not-so-subtle version of the type. Sterling is, often, more overt in promulgating this type. In *Islands In The Net* (Sterling, 1989), the entire economy of the Grenadines is based on finding new uses for technology.

At the core of this fantasy type is the power the technologically adept enjoy over others. In *Neuromancer*, the entire plotline deals with (1) a man who uses computerized Cyberspace to engage in criminal behavior, and (2) an artificial intelligence using human agents to free itself from technology that limits the growth of its already prodi-

gious intelligence and power. Both these lines are literally embodiments — one within a human, and one within a non-human — of the theme of finding non-traditional uses for technology to better one's own power position.

That the street finds its own uses for things implies another deeply embedded theme for the Cyberpunks: those in authority (corporate, governmental or otherwise) can similarly use technology to limit the freedoms enjoyed by the technologically adept. This theme is a primary fantasy type for the Cyberpunks, and it runs throughout their texts, and is shown mainly within the textual disdain with which characters hold governmental and authority figures in Cyberpunk, a disdain that translated well to the young, overwhelmingly male, technological adepts who make up the Cyberpunk culture. In *Neuromancer* (1985), it is the *yakuza*, the Japanese crime organization, which holds true power, Personal power is represented in terms of knowledge and favor. In *Islands In The Net*, on the other hand, power is held by multinational corporations, who conduct quasi-governmental actions without typical sovereign authority. In both cases, however, governmental agents and characters, with the notable exception of intelligence operatives, are in general held with disdain or, in most cases, ignored altogether and absent from the texts. This is in part due to the rebellious nature of Cyberpunk texts, but it is also due to the fact that most Cyberpunk protagonists, like the cultural members, are not members of traditional authority groups and, in general, consider such authority invasive at best and fascist at worst. This fantasy type, then, also embodies the rebellion against authority that is prevalent in the culture. For example, the scientist character

Prentis in *Islands In The Net* shows the protagonists a monomolecular machete — a syncretic ideal, old and new technology fused for new purposes. The protagonists' reaction is a telling moment:

> "I can never see this through . . . I know we use ceramic blades in machine tools . . . but that's in factory settings, with safety standards! You can't just sell 'em to all and sundry —it's like handing out personal flame throwers!"
>
> Andrei spoke up. "Don't tell us, David — tell Singapore. They are radical technical capitalists. They don't care about forests; they have no forests to lose."
>
> Laura nodded. "That's not farming, that's mass destruction. That'll have to be stopped."
>
> Prentis shook his head. "We've got one chance to stop it, and that's to put every goddamn farmer out of business." He paused "Yeah, honest old Yeoman farmer, and the wife, and his million goddamn kids. They're eating the planet alive."
>
> Prentis reached absently through the hole in his desk and pulled out a tube of glue. "That's all that matters. Sure, maybe we've cooked a little dope for Grenada, liberated a few programs, but that's just for start-up money. We make food. And we make jobs to make food. See all those people working down there? You wouldn't see 'em in a stateside plant. The way we do it down here, it's labor-intensive — people who might have been farmers, making their own food, for their own country. Not just handouts, dumped from some charity plane by rich nations."
>
> "We have no quarrel with that," Laura said.
>
> "Sure you do," Prentis said. "You don't want it stripped down and cheap. You want it expensive and controlled, and totally safe. You don't want peasants and slum kids with that kind of technical power. You're afraid of it." He pointed to the machete. "But you can't have it both ways. All tech is dangerous — even with no moving parts." (Sterling, 1989, p. 122).

Prentis speaks for the Cyberpunk in this case, although Laura is the protagonist. It is Prentis who is not only bending technology to his own uses, but, like Prometheus, delivers that technology to the "peasants and

slum kids" with anti-authoritarian fervor.

The Hacker Ethos

And it is in the part of these peasants and slum kids that the Cyberpunk sees himself. A major archetypal character within the Cyberpunk *mythos* is that of the Hacker: the lone, technologically adroit "freedom fighter" of sorts, whose rebellion tends to take a limited variety of courses. The Hacker — from the verb, "to hack," which originally meant to break into a secure computer system, but has more recently begun to mean proficiency in any endeavor — has much in common with the mythological Wizard character and the 1930s and 40s *film noir* private detective character. All tend to be marginalized characters, yet not without power; all have access to "forbidden knowledge;" all tend to be loners who rely on this knowledge to survive. And all tend to hold anti-authoritarian philosophies. The Hacker, prior to being assimilated by the Cyberpunk culture, was already attaining mythical status among the traditional cultures of the technological adept. Prevalent among the Hacker's characteristics is a sense of being, if not above, at least operating outside the traditional legal parameters. The Hacker began as an outlaw of sorts within the technological culture, and this aspect of his character ("his" being true here, as Hacker in both the popular press and Cyberpunk literature are almost universally male) was seized upon and enhanced within the Cyberpunk literature. Donahoo and Etheridge (1992) add that " . . . though in traditional terms [Cyberpunk] heroes might be branded outlaws, murderers or, at least, psychologically unbalanced, their stories reveal them as necessary agents of beneficial and

necessary change. They are not deluded pests but instigators of regeneration. (p. 183). Suvin (1985) analogizes the Cyberpunk protagonist with the Japanese concept of *ronin* — historically, a *samurai* without master. In the Japanese context, *ronin* were wandering *samurai*, disgraced but still not without a measure of dignity (if only coming from the points of their *katana*), who were often consulted as judges in disputes or who sold their services and worked as caravan security, guards for criminals, or mercenaries. Again, even with the *ronin* analogy, we see the emphasis on technical (and technological) expertise and self-reliance gained through the use of this expertise.

But the main characteristic of the Hacker archetype, aside from technological proficiency, is anti-authoritarianism. This is consistent with the fantasy of "the street having its own uses for things," in that it is the Hacker who *finds* these uses — it is his technological superiority that, coupled with anti-authoritarianism, prompts the members of the Cyberpunk culture to develop alternate and, often, contrarian uses for technology. Female characters are generally held to this standard as well, although to lesser extents. Science fiction (and Cyberpunk is no exception) has been traditionally a male bastion, and numerous themes within science fiction cater to this. Broderick (1995) states: " . . . complaints by Foyster, Ross and feminist Nicola Nixon that Gibson relies on male teenagers' fantasies is accurate enough, but irrelevant to what is most impressively at work in these texts: an interaction between novel signifiers and cliche-derived syntagms which create, in Delany's terms, a new 'web' of signification" (p. 82). Science fiction has always catered to adolescent males, and they still make up the vast portion of the audi-

ence. But as science fiction as a literary form has matured (and so, subsequently, has the science fiction culture), this return to the male-dominated viewpoint of Cyberpunk is another return to historico-literary roots for the authors. Shiner (1992) states that " . . .it's no wonder that the image of the 'console cowboy' so strongly attracts the writers of [Cyberpunk]. The console cowboy is a direct linear descendant of the Western pulp heroes. His is an adolescent male fantasy, to ride unfettered on the consensual range of the matrix, to shoot it out with the bad guys, and finally head off on his chrome horse into a sunset the color of a dead television channel" (p. 23). Shiner is not far off with his Cowboy analogy, when seen as the Western outlaw. Most of Gibson's protagonists — Case, Molly, Bobby, Turner, Slick Henry, Johnny Mnemonic — are criminals. Sterling's protagonists tend to be less so, but often serve as foils to the truer Cyberpunk characters in the text (e.g., the relationship between protagonist Laura and Cyberpunks Prentis and Sticky Thompson in *Islands In The Net*). The protagonist in *Snow Crash* (Stephenson, 1992), considered a seminal Cyberpunk text, is a pizza deliveryman for the Mafia who regularly fights with swords. Cyberpunk protagonists are marginalized characters, who have developed technical proficiency and use it in anti-authoritarian fashions.

America the Fallen

Another Cyberpunk fantasy type is that of "America the Fallen." The America portrayed in the Cyberpunk texts is far different from that portrayed in the science fiction of previous epochs. In the 1940s, American culture was, literally, universal. The spacefarers of the 1940s, the

protagonists of the Space Operas, were American, if not in actual nationality then in general thought and enculturation. They often were portrayed not only as embodiments of American cultural precepts — the "can do" attitude, a sense of pragmatism coupled with hope in the face of adversity, and distaste for the cultures and mores of others — but as proselytizers as well. This is seen when science fiction authors gave their aliens American English to speak, and portrayed alien cultures as either (1) very much like that of America at the time, a validation of their usually high level of technical sophistication and benevolence, or (2) as holding the antitheses of the mores of American culture. Aliens portrayed in the latter fashion were usually brought around to the protagonist's way of thinking, or dispatched with impunity.

But Cyberpunk constructs a different view of the future. Although not as marked in Gibson's work as in Sterling's, Cyberpunk holds the view that America will not retain the superiority it has enjoyed in the past. In Sterling's work, Russians and Moslems abound, and are featured as protagonists. Gibson preferred Japanese and Central European characters, with the former occurring more often. In each, however, and throughout Cyberpunk, the emphasis is distinctly moved away from the American and his culture. Examples of this fantasy type are abundant in Cyberpunk texts: in Gibson's Sprawl series, a primary motivator is the *yakuza*, or Japanese Mafia, whose favor is seen as the ultimate boon and whose enmity, a death sentence. In *Idoru* (Gibson, 1996), a pair of Russian police officers are a motivating factor, and are portrayed in a positive Cyberpunk light. For Sterling, the Third World and multinational corporations are the primary ascendant cultures. In *Islands In*

The Net, the protagonist Laura operates from a primarily socio-corporate philosophy, while secondary characters are Grenadine, Singaporean, and Russian. Very few Americans are portrayed in positive Cyberpunk viewpoints in Sterling's work, while Americans are almost always portrayed in favorable Cyberpunk style. Sterling also portrays Islamic cultures as ascendant in many of his works. In "The Compassionate, the Digital" (Sterling, 1992b), the world's first artificial intelligence sings praises to Allah, while in "We See Things Differently," the dedication and purposefulness of a Muslim assassin is lauded. "The Gulf Wars" in the same collection examines the Jewish-Arabic conflict. In *Islands In The Net*, Laura is saved by African Muslim rebels, and their hardiness and technical proficiency (both prized Cyberpunk qualities) are emphasized in the text. At one point, a Muslim *Imam* sings a prayer of thanks, which Laura overhears:

> "I humbly adore the acts of the Most High,
> who has given to the synthesizer what is better
> than a soul.
> So that, when it plays, the men are silent,
> and their hands cover their veils to hide their
> emotions.
> The troubles of life were pushing me into a tomb,
> but thanks to the synthesizer,
> God has given me my life back."
> (Sterling, 1989, p. 354)

The predominance of the Japanese in future affairs modifies this fantasy type, and is an older version of the previously noted points in Cyberpunk. Gibson uses Japanese characters more often than Russian or Islamic characters, and to great effect. More importantly, perhaps,

than the sheer number of Japanese characters in Cyberpunk literature is the underlying voice of the Japanese culture which can be seen in many Cyberpunk texts, whether Japanese characters are in them or not. Part of the Cyberpunk inclusion of Asian culture in general and the Japanese culture in particular is rooted in the Eastern connection with computer and other technologies. Despite the influence of American firms in the computer industry, it is the Japanese who are developing the newest and most innovative subordinate technologies (e.g., the digital camera, virtual reality, Internet programming applications). Not to be discounted is the overwhelming Japanese presence in the field of electronic gaming and entertainment; nearly all home video game players are of Japanese origin, as are the game themselves. With the addition of highly technical entertainment that embodies many Cyberpunk themes (e.g., *mangai* and *hentai* animation, or *anime*, best seen in the Cyberpunk movie *Akira*), the Japanese culture not only figures prominently in Cyberpunk texts and culture but has contributed to them as well.

Hard work, collectivism, an integration of technology and culture, and a sense of sacrifice are all parts of the Japanese *ethos* that appear constantly in Cyberpunk texts. Historically, the rise of the Japanese can be seen as one of the greatest resurgences of all time: a culture once proud, then marginalized after World War II, returning again to prominence through industriousness and a willingness to embrace technology. The Cyberpunk culture identifies with this history, and subsequently prizes the culture from which it stems, emphasizing and affirming it in the texts. The example of the *yakuza* as a prime plot motivator is valid again here. Throughout the Sprawl series, Tokyo and Chiba, Japan are the locales of

off-stage, motivating occurrences. Dollars are replaced throughout Cyberpunk texts with " New Yen." Even more ubiquitous is the facility with which Gibson engages in what "Sourcerer" (1996b) refers to as "product placement," the seemingly innocuous in-text asides he uses to enhance scene description but, when taken in light of the highly evocative style of Cyberpunk literature, lend more credibility to the textual setting. In *Count Zero*, Conroy and Turner are discussing an upcoming "extraction," and almost obliquely Conroy mentions " . . . One scenario Hosaka showed me, we'd get Mitchell out here, clean him up, stick him on *Tsushima*, and full steam for old Japan" (Gibson, 1986a, p. 20). "Zaibatsumen" and "JAL shuttles" abound. In Gibson's Cyberpunk (and, since Gibson is the foremost Cyberpunk writer, throughout the culture), the Japanese and their influence have become a staple of the environment, like technology itself. The walls of the Cyberpunk environment are decorated with Japanese cultural artifacts.

Hybridization and the Interzone

Cyberpunk culture is, in many ways, a hybrid of many cultures as it functions as an overall cultural critique. Hybridization is, in fact, a prominent fantasy type within the Cyberpunk milieu. It is in Cyberpunk, as opposed to most science fiction, where the theme of hybridization is most explored. Cyberpunk is a highly syncretic form of literature, melding themes and fantasy types from the numerous (Golden Age science fiction, *film noir*, American Western) visions that preceded it. The hybridization fantasy type is presented in various ways in the Cyberpunk texts. One is the hybridization of cultures, East and West,

and the barriers between them that, in the Cyberpunk *mythos*, are erased. The locales in Cyberpunk are indicative of this hybridization, and areas where hybridization is emphasized. In *Neuromancer*, this takes many forms: Case's ability to become a part of cyberspace, the "consensual hallucination of the matrix," (Gibson, 1984, p. 3); Molly's augmentations, including biomechanical "claws;" 3Jane's connection with Wintermute, in which "programming" is exchanged while 3Jane is in cryogenic sleep, and later 3Jane functioning as an appendage, a functionary, of Wintermute itself. Gibson perpetuates the theme of hybridization throughout the Sprawl series and, in many ways, the Cyberpunk texts are in themselves an interzone, where these integrative, syncretic concepts are promulgated.

But the primary hybridization fantasy with the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision is that of the hybrid of man and machine. The Cyberpunk culture has historically been very liberal on what it is that makes a machine. The concept of what it is that makes Man, however, is blurred in the Cyberpunk culture by the liberality and ubiquitousness of Machine. A telling passage from *Neuromancer* exemplifies the cybernetic dilemma at the heart of the Cyberpunk texts:

> "Motive," the construct said. "Real motive problem, with an AI. Not human, see?"
>
> "Well, yeah, obviously."
>
> "Nope. I mean, it's not human. And you can't get a handle on it. Me, I'm not human either, but I *respond* like one. See?"
>
> "Wait a sec," Case said. "Are you sentient, or not?"
>
> "Well, it feels like I am, kid, but I'm really just a bunch of ROM. It's one of them, uh, philosophical questions,

> I guess . . ." The ugly laughter sensation rattled down Case's spine. "But I ain't likely to write you no poem, if you follow me. Your AI, it just might. But it ain't in no way *human*" (Gibson, 1985, pp. 131-32, italics in text).

We see one of the primary conflicts in Cyberpunk in this passage, and one of the primary motivators in the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision: the question: what is it that separates, in the technological environment, Man and Machine? Where does one begin and the other leave off? The Cyberpunk's answer: everywhere, and nowhere, at once. The Flatline behaves like a man, yet is not; Case is a man, but his philosophy is technological, that of Machine. Wintermute, a combination of both, is philosophically neither, a new entity in the debate that defies accurate definition. The Cyberpunk texts and subsequent rhetorical vision is replete with this sort of enigma — Case and Flatline in *Neuromancer*, Angie's *veves* in *Count Zero*, which allow her to access the matrix without a computer "deck" and bring her into proximity with artificial intelligences set loose in cyberspace, Bobby's hardwired interface with the computer-generated universe of the Aleph in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. The dilemma is twofold; at one end, Cyberpunk includes the philosophy of the Cyborg into its vision — the conceptual environment of the biochip, of human augmentation with technology. Here, the Cyberpunk vision is only a half-step ahead of reality, for already, humanity and technology have a long history of interrelation. For example, the pacemaker has been used successfully for decades. Are those who use pacemakers Cyborgs? The Cyberpunk rhetorical vision claims yes, and claims this is so back to the prosthetics used for centuries. In addition,

the Cyberpunk vision includes the future augmentation — the biochip, obviously, but also the more ephemeral melding of mind and machine. In *Neuromancer*, it is the human-AI conflict, Case versus Wintermute, at the same time that Case is aiding Wintermute to become both something more and something less than what it is, which in itself is ill-defined. At the same time, Wintermute's needs Case's aid to reunite with its counterpart (sibling?) Neuromancer. The pair make a whole, although a whole *what* is in dispute, and this mirrors the ends to which Case's journey takes him within the text. Is Case a cyborg because of his relationship to cyberspace? Again, the rhetorical vision of the Cyberpunk culture would say yes; but in the Cyberpunk reality, the stigma of being a cyborg vanishes. Cyborgism is a valued cultural epitome in the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision, and as such is actively sought, rather than dismissed. It is *augmentation*, rather than negation, of the human portion of the cyborg to attach itself to the Machine portion. In this, we have the familiar environment of syncretism — of joining together of two disparate elements — that is a hallmark of Cyberpunk culture. At the same time, Olsen (1995) states that the roles of Human and Machine are reversed in the Cyberpunk texts, and describes the characters as "highly complicated automata," but adds that Wintermute, the Machine, the AI, "betrays, schemes, murders. . . out of deep desire" (p. 288). Part of this can be credited to the nature of the Cyberpunk literary style, which is dense, fast moving, and leaves little time for introspection. But the effect only adds to the Cyberpunk identification with the Cartesian machine-theory.

The augmentation fantasy type is found in a variety of aspects in the Cyberpunk texts. In the above examples, it exemplifies the machine/man

dichotomy and integration; but it is seen in other forms as well throughout the Cyberpunk *oeuvre*. In addition to being a legacy of the culture from which the Cyberpunk authors themselves come, drugs and drug use has been associated with the Cyberpunk texts since the term was coined; textually, it is a legacy from the New Wave writers, to whom altered states of consciousness were an integral part of their world view, as reflected in their works. *Neuromancer*'s Case, the first and preeminent Cyberpunk protagonist, is addicted to and enjoys powerful amphetamines. Shirley's protagonists, in the short story, "Freezone" (in Sterling, 1986) are all psychedelic addicts. Bobby worries about "dusters" in *Count Zero*. Sterling's Grenadines in *Island In The Net* manufacture and use drugs throughout the text. In *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, Mona uses "wiz," a type of amphetamine, while the technically proficient but unbalanced Gentry is bribed with drugs to provide power and ignore Slick Henry's guests:

> He held up the clear plastic Ziploc for Gentry to see: blue derms, pink tablets, a nasty-looking turd of opium in a twist of red cellophane, crystals of wiz like fat yellow throat lozenges, plastic inhalers with the Japanese manufacturer's name scraped off with a knife . . . "From Afrika," Slick said, dangling the Ziploc.
>
> "Africa?" Gentry looked at the bag, at Slick, the bag again. "From Africa?"
>
> "Kid Afrika. You don't know him. Left this for you." (Gibson, 1993, p. 81)

Drug use is prevalent in Cyberpunk, and is a primary part of the overall vision of the Cyberpunk culture. Most of this, however, can be assigned less to the textual elements of Cyberpunk science fiction than to the attitudes toward drug use held by the larger cultural environment — less "cyber" and more "punk," in a sense. Like the original punks

from whom the name stems, the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision, like in the case of cyborgism, embraces the aspects of the drug culture normally disconfirmed. Partly, this is cultural rebelliousness; partly, it is disaffection with the repressive aspects of the dominant culture concerning drugs and the derision with which that culture holds the Cyberpunk. But mostly, as with much of the hybridization aspects of the Cyberpunks, it is displeasure with the frailties of the flesh which instigate the augmentation. This dissatisfaction with the parameters of the body itself mandates augmentation. For Case, the body is "meat"; when criminals destroy his ability to enter the Matrix, he is not maimed in the traditional sense; rather, he is thrown back into " . . . the prison of his own flesh" (Gibson, 1985, p. 4). Bobby escapes his flesh into the aleph, and Angie escapes her flesh into the semi-voodoo godhood of the matrix *loa*. Slick Henry's art comes as a method of transcending his flesh, which has been poisoned by his time in prison. Molly has claws, because she's "gotta tussle." In every instance, the flesh is something to be despised and augmented. The concerns of the flesh are the antithesis of the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision, and the transcendence of these concerns is consequently a primary aspect of the vision.

Mirrorshades, the Cyberpunk Metafantasy

Perhaps encompassing all these elements is the overarching fantasy meta-type that seems to modify and affect the other fantasies that surround it — the signifying fantasy, the presentational archetype of the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision, summed up best in the term "Mirrorshades." Mirrorshades represents everything that makes the

Cyberpunk rhetorical vision a *vision*, as opposed to a collection of textual elements incorporated into new slang terms and technical prowess. Rather, the Mirrorshades fantasy meta-type represents not the textual aspects of the Cyberpunk culture but the social aspects of it, as presented by those who consider themselves Cyberpunks, readers and authors alike.

The concept of Mirrorshades was taken by the Cyberpunks at the very beginning of their existence as a vision, and served as a primary consciousness-creating symbol. Sterling's (1988) collection of early Cyberpunk short fictions bears the name *Mirrorshades*, and the symbol figures prominently in many Cyberpunk works. *Neuromancer*'s Molly has mirrored, inset lenses over her eyes. "Freezone"'s Rickenharp wears dark glasses at night and has a mirrored "visorclip" through which he sees art while listening to music (p. 149). Bobby Newmark wears mirrored sunglasses after surviving an attack by rival gang members.

Duality and syncretism are at the heart of the Mirrorshades symbol. On one side — hipness, attitude, the rebellious *ethos* of the punks. Mirrorshades both reflect and obscure — reflect the elements of that surround the rhetorical vision back outside, keeping the culture separated and invisible to the environment in which it exists. And obscure: "By hiding the eyes, mirrorshades prevent the forces of normalcy from realizing that one is crazed and possibly dangerous. They are the symbol of the sun-staring visionary, the biker, the rocker, the policeman, and similar outlaws" (Sterling, 1988, p. xi). The Mirrorshades symbol serves as a totem and a protective shield; one may identify fellows and ignore outsiders with equal efficiency. At the same time, Mirrorshades are a

recursive element, a connection with the past. All of Sterling's signifiers, those he associates with the Mirrorshades symbol — rocker, policeman, biker — are not only ongoing cultural elements but are, in fact, elements of cultures past. Although the Cyberpunk culture is inherently a culture of the 1980s, the symbol they choose is recursive and more suited to the 1940s and 50s than that to which it has been more recently attached.

On the other side, technology. Mirrorshades are chromium and matte black, the colors of computer technology. The reflective lenses mimic the LED screen and the computer monitor, making the human behind them seem less man than machine, flesh augmented with metallic coating. Sterling (1988) explains: "For Cyberpunks . . . technology is visceral. It is not the remote genie of Big Science boffins; it is pervasive, utterly intimate. Not outside us, but next to us. Under our skin; often, inside our minds" (p. xiii). In *Neuromancer*, Molly's mirrorshades are grafted to her eye sockets, a smooth, seamless weld of technology and humanity. Because of this, she cannot cry. Instead, her tear ducts, she says, have been routed to her mouth. She spits. This is the presentational archetype of the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision. Overall, the effect is separatory and interior-directed. As Olsen (1995) suggests, Cyberpunk has combined the elements of freedom, discovery and solitude found in the Cowboy archetype with the Byronic hero: " . . . the isolated, self-reliant, gloomy, questing, sun-staring visionary rebel" (p. 289). Case, Bobby, even to Gentry, " . . . a crazed prophet searching for the unifying Shape" Olsen asserts (p. 290), Cyberpunk protagonists are telling the same tale: the tale of Ulysses, of traveling far and coming back transformed. The Cyberpunks use the

Mirrorshades symbol to separate themselves from the rest of the masses, both physically and philosophically.

Cyberpunk Fantasy Types in *The Difference Engine*

The Difference Engine of history is, quite simply, a mechanical calculator. Babbage, a mid-19th century mathematician, designed the calculator but never built a working model. A Swedish father and son team of engineers undertook that chore in 1853. The machine, as Babbage designed it, worked very well, if crudely.

The Difference Engine of the novel (Gibson & Sterling, 1991), on the other hand, exhibits a great deal of stylistic extravagance, unlike the object from which it takes its name and. According to Killheffer (1992), *The Difference Engine* serves to illustrate the " . . . major changes that have occurred in science fiction over the last 40 or 50 years" (p. 18). In many ways, however, *The Difference Engine* reaffirms the fantasy types that comprise the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision. This is in line with Bormann's (1996) Principle of Reiteration: "The principle of reiteration asserts that visions are sustained by restating the key fantasy themes and types in new patterns that encapsulate the dramatic structure of the vision" (p. 20).

To reiterate, the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision consists primarily of six interrelated fantasy types:

(1) People find uses for technology not originally planned during the development of that technology.

(2) The personal archetype (*ethos*) is that of the Hacker.

(3) The lines between Man and Machine are becoming indistinct

(4) The geographical archetype (*topos*) is that of the Inter zone, locales where Hybridization takes place.

(5) "American the Fallen."

(6) The signifying/presentation archetype (*logos*) is that of the Mirrorshades.

The Difference Engine addresses each of these fantasy types. In the case of "the street finding its own use for things," even in a Victorian milieu, street people are represented as having a certain pragmatic hardiness, shown early on by Sybil and Radley, and later to a certain extent by Mallory (although he represents less of a Cyberpunk archetype than the Steampunk aspects of heroism) and the kino-clackers, who use the Engine technology to provide background (a representation of future multimedia presentations) for public speakers. Tobias, a clacker at the Central Statistics Bureau, considers the kino-clacker the cutting edge of Engine programming. Among the devotees' work are " . . . some quite amazing things" (p. 142). Art, for Tobias, is the true end of Engine technology, as opposed to mere computation, or "Engine mathematics" as Mallory refers to it. Sybil, despite Luddite aspects of her past, goes from being a minor whore to an "adventuress," taking advantage of Radley's technology for the promise of better things to come (p. 8). Radley, similarly, explains to Sybil the most important aspect of success in their venture: "It's what a cove *knows* that counts, ain't it, Sybil? More than land or money, more than birth. *Information*. Very flash" (p. 8). Similarly, the criminal elements and villains are represented as being similarly technologically savvy and are often found to be "heroes" in

Cyberpunk fiction and culture. It is Captain Swing and Florence Bartlett who are first seen, along with Ada Byron, in possession of the Modus. It is, however, the villains' manipulations of the Victorian media that most reflect the themes within Cyberpunk. At one point, Captain Swing uses a number of sophisticated media manipulations to bring trouble for Mallory, including Engine-faked photographs, and an involved section in which Mallory, traversing London at the height of the Stench, encounters a billsticker putting up libelous advertisements constructed by Swing. Particularly Cyberpunk is the way Mallory befriends the billsticker, bribes him with the prospect of fresh, un-billed walls, and then purchases the rest of the libelous bills before they can be posted. As the street finds alternative uses for technology, so can the technology (or, in this case, the media and its outlets) be manipulated. Examples of this technological proficiency can be found throughout the text, in the Cyberpunk style.

At the same time Gibson and Sterling clearly portrayed another fantasy type: how uses are found for technology that were not originally planned during the development of that technology. Mallory describes the betting kiosks at the steam gurney race as " . . . thoroughly modern," and in his ears the " . . . deep brassing whirring of the three engines they employed" (p. 87). The value of engines is emphasized later in the text, and at the same time the gambling stalls have engines to keep track of the bettors' marks and print the receipts. In Chapter 3, Ada Byron is reputed to have "woven pure algebra" into a clothing pattern favored by savants (p. 102). Later, Mallory lauds the taste of " . . . fine, machine made brew, free of any cheaters' taint of jalop or Indian berry" (p. 231).

In each of these cases, the valuable technology of the Engines has been co-opted for other, more mundane, "street" pursuits. This coincides with the Cyberpunk vision in two ways. First, Gibson and Sterling reiterate their one of their primary fantasy types — the technology is modified to the implementations of the current user.

The most obvious example of this type is the introduction of the Modus into the plotline. We first encounter the Modus, the central exigent in the text, when Radley, true to his Cyberpunk roots, is trying to get the corrupt Rudwick to arrange a meeting between Radley and Babbage. Radley has the Modus — the parameters of which remain undefined through most of the text — and his behavior leads the reader to believe it is his most valuable possession. Radley refers to it as a "clacking sequence" (a Victorian term in the novel for computer program) and we find, incrementally as the novel progresses, that the Modus is a new program that purportedly may take into account myriad variables and predict future events — in essence, a prototype artificial intelligence. But as we go through the chapters, we find that each of the characters would have the Modus for different reasons. Radley sees it only as a way, despite his disregard for "bettering blokes," to improve his reputation and garner wealth (p. 34). Ada, who we later find is the developer of the Modus, delivers it to Swing and Bartlett to pay off gambling debts. Swing and Bartlett, anti-savant Luddites allied with American Communists, wish to use to the Modus to bring about the end of British imperial activities. Oliphant, perhaps the "most Cyberpunk" of all the characters in thought, wishes to have the Modus for his employers at the Central Statistics Bureau, so they may begin social experimentation and, eventu-

ally, oppression. At the same time, the Modus itself takes on a literary life of its own, and one that fits in well with the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision. We learn in the last chapter that the Modus sequence has been run in France, causing " . . . disturbances in the higher functions" of the French engines, "The Grande Napoleon" (p. 387). This is a reflection of the technological perversity of the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision — the willingness to use technology not only for personal ends, but to use it for anti-authoritarian ends as well.

These anti-authoritarian ends in *The Difference Engine* are similar to others throughout the Cyberpunk texts. Oliphant works for the authoritarian Central Statistics Bureau, whose technology outstrips that of the masses and whose purposes are unknown, although later in the novel we find them considering various sorts of social repression and eugenics with a remarkable indifference for the victims of their technology. A telling incident occurs in Chapter 5, when Oliphant and his apparent superior Wakefield discuss the effect British application of the Modus will have on the general public:

> "I've just come from Fleet Street," Oliphant said. "The level of violence in this society" — and he drew the Ballester-Mollina from his coat — "or rather, I should say, the level of unacknowledged violence, has become remarkable, don't you think, Andrew?" He placed the revolver on the linen between them. "Take this pistol for example. All too readily obtainable, I'm told. It is of Franco-Mexican manufacture, though the invention of Spaniards. Certain of its internal parts, I am informed, springs and whatnot, are actually British, available on the open market. It becomes rather difficult, then, to say where a weapon like this comes from. Emblematic of something in our current situation, don't you think?"

> Wakefield had gone quite white.
>
> "But I seem to have upset you, Andrew. I'm sorry"
>
> "They'll erase us," Wakefield said. "We'll cease to exist. There'll be nothing left, nothing to prove either of us ever lived. Not a check-stub, not a mortgage in a City bank, nothing whatever."
>
> "Exactly what I'm on about, Andrew."
>
> "Don't take that moral tone with me, sir," Wakefield said. "Your lot began it, Oliphant — the disappearances, the files gone missing, the names expunged, numbers lost, histories edited to suit specific ends . . . No, don't take that tone with me."
>
> Oliphant could think of nothing to say. He rose, leaving the pistol on the table-cloth, and left the grill-room without looking back. (p. 379-80)

This passage not only exemplifies the fantasy type but also emphasizes the Cyberpunk anti-authoritarian stance. At first, the reader's sympathies are with the Cyberpunk Oliphant; he has twisted the Modus to, if not his own uses, away from that of Swing and Bartlett. But the reader learns that Oliphant is also a tool of the authorities, which plan to continue with their social experimentation and repression. It is Wakefield, rather than Oliphant, who has realized the portent of the technological future. Gibson and Sterling are showing here what the eventual outcome of "finding its own use for technology" can be. The Cyberpunk culture, according to Gibson and Sterling, does not have sole ownership on technological cross application. Rather, anyone may find a use for technology, including uses that work in direct opposition to the Cyberpunk culture. Wakefield's indictment of Oliphant's "lot" is an indictment of the Cyberpunk culture and the fantasy of "street" level technology. The Promethean desire to bring technology to the masses

can backfire, in the end, on the bringer. In the end Oliphant cannot reply to Wakefield's charge, indicating that Gibson and Sterling, as Cyberpunks, cannot themselves justify the fantasy. They have, instead, left the "pistol" on the table, for anyone to retrieve later.

Despite this, most of the representatives of government in *The Difference Engine* conform to the Cyberpunk anti-authoritarian ideal — ruthless without cause, ignorant, oppressive, and although somewhat technically proficient not so to the level of the protagonists. Many of the Rad Lords — Egremont, Rudwick, Ada, Darwin, even Babbage himself — are portrayed as crude, lecherous and prone to vice. Rudwick, especially, is drawn coarsely. He frequents "ratting pits," where rats fight and wagers are laid. Eventually, a ruffian kills him in one. He is a man of "astonishing ugliness, pop-eyed and blue-jowled," lecherous (he gazes lasciviously at Sybil) and rude (he spreads gossip and makes accusations) (p. 29). Ada, the "Queen of Engines," is portrayed as a hopeless gambler at the mercy of blackguards for her debts. Even Mallory, once he is brought into the Geographical Society, begins to fall into vice with the prostitute Hetty. Mallory's fall is well documented, and consumes more than 20 pages in the text. Oliphant, we find later, is syphilitic. Houston, a drunken tyrant and traitor. In all, authority in any form is treated with contempt, and their actions, when not outwardly oppressive, are vice-ridden. Not only does this reaffirm the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision, it explicates it in a way that is usually ill defined in the traditional Cyberpunk texts. Why are the Cyberpunks perverting technology to their own devices? To defend themselves against the machinations of authority. Why are those machinations to be fought? Because those in authority are vice-ridden and

corrupt, unlike the Cyberpunks they attempt to control. In all, this seems to indicate, as King (1981) asserts, that the Cyberpunks, like most science fiction cultures, represent themselves not only as highly moral and conservative, but reactionary as well.

Despite some complexities, the protagonists of *The Difference Engine* fit admirably into the Hacker archetype, despite the Steampunk setting. Radley alternates between acting as Houston's representative and attempting to peddle the Modus — technical proficiency coupled with anti-authoritarianism, even the "local" authority represented by his employer, exemplifying the Cyberpunk *ronin* ideal. Sybil displays a measure of the same, and her relationship to *Neuromancer*'s (1985) Molly should not be discounted; both are former prostitutes seeking higher fortunes, both rely primarily on either their wits or sexual strengths to win out over adversary, and both are physically dangerous. Sybil matches the ideal for Cyberpunk women, in a rhetorical vision where women are, at best, secondary: dangerously sexual, potentially violent, yet subordinate to the primary male protagonist. Wakefield, the Special Branch policeman, is representative of Sterling's mirrorshades-wearing "outlaw cop" *sans* shades, dealing justice roughly with Mallory against Swing, yet returning always the engines at the Central Statistics Bureau, where his expertise is greater and his affect more prevalent. Of the protagonists, however, it is Tobias that best represents the Cyberpunk ideal, despite his limited appearance in the text. Tobias is a mid-level "clacker," or engine-programmer, at the Central Statistics Bureau, and as such is technically expert, familiar with the use and abuse of the new technologies introduced in the text. Yet at the same time, Tobias

has a hidden, artistic side, as a latter-day multimedia programmer, or "kino-clacker," designing film-like presentations to accompany speakers or as singular artworks, popular amongst the underground devotees of the new art form. Representing the technical aspect of the Hacker, we find Tobias lecturing Mallory on the mores of the Central Statistics Bureau and Mallory, a proto-Cyberpunk, taking well to them:

> "You should know better than to offer gratuities to a public servant."
>
> "You look as if you could use it," Mallory said.
>
> "Ten days' wage? I expect I could. Providin' I find you right and fly."
>
> "I mean no harm," Mallory said mildly. "This place is strange territory. In such circumstances, I've found it wise to have a native guide."
>
> "What's wrong with the boss, then?"
>
> "I was hoping you'd tell me that, Mr. Tobias."
>
> More than the coin, the remark itself seemed to win Tobias over. He shrugged. "Wakey's not so bad. If I were him, I wouldn't act any different. But he ran your number today, guv'nor, and pulled a stack nine inches high. You've some talkative friend, you do, Mr. Mallory."
>
> "Do you like your work, Mr. Tobias?"
>
> "Pays not much. Gas-light ruins your eyes. But it has its advantages." He shrugged again (p. 136).

Later in the same conversation with Mallory, Tobias shows his true feelings regarding the uses of Engines:

> "I'm no scientist, anyway. It's art that I live for. Kinotropy!"
>
> "Theatre work, eh? They say it's in the blood."
>
> "I spend every spare shilling on spinning-time," the boy said. "We have a little club of enthusiasts. The Palladium rents its kinotrope to us, during the wee hours. You see quite

> amazing things, along with a good deal of amateur drivel."
>
> "Fascinating," Mallory said. "I hear that, er . . ." He had to struggle to remember the man's name. "I hear that John Keats is quite good."
>
> "He's old," the boy said with a ruthless shrug. "You should see Sandys. Or Hughes. Or Etty" (p. 142).

It is these two passages we see the Hacker fantasy type at work in *The Difference Engine* — Tobias working by day in the Central Statistics Bureau, where the job pays badly but has "advantages;" by night, a multimedia *aficionado*, using the engines to generate a new kind of artwork.

In Steampunk works, the emphasis away from Americans as protagonists is similar to that of the Cyberpunk texts, but the means are different. Because Steampunk follows a more stringent set of literary rules in which setting figures prominently, the emphasis is necessarily away from American culture. By forcing its authors to set their stories in a Victorian England environment, the authors are necessarily prevented from placing a good deal of emphasis on American culture. Although Powers' protagonists are American, for example, they are set in the Steampunk environment and it, not they, serves as the primary character. The environment serves then, in Steampunk, as a character in its own right, and often a more powerfully drawn and, within the narrative, more important member of the cast.

Steampunk functions as well as a recursive element in science fiction and has been lumped together, in many ways, with the variety of science fiction termed "alternative history." Steampunk authors, then, because they write from a culturally American environment of which they them-

selves are part, often include American characters, or at least refer to America. In *The Anubis Gates* (Powers, 1983), America is still considered a savage place, and the protagonist Doyle uses his heritage to cover for his unique ways and perspective. In *The Difference Engine*, America is shriven, broken into numerous small territories and lawless states. Gibson and Sterling portray America as a haven for criminals, Communists and, in general, a land of savages. To add to this, Gibson and Sterling included, in one of the beginning leafs of the novel, a world map, with political boundaries drawn in. The map is not referred to in the text, so its only purpose for inclusion must be to emphasize (1) the radically different world that the engine has built, and (2) the place that America holds in that world. On this map, America is divided into seven separate sections in 1855: U.S.A., C.S.A. (for Confederate States of America), the Republic of Texas, the Republic of California, French Mexico, the Manhattan Commune (a haven for proto-Communists) and a large section of land marked only as "Unorganized Territory."

The America the Fallen fantasy type recurs frequently. Early in the novel, Sam Houston is portrayed as a drunken, boorish traitor and is nearly killed by a fellow "Texian" (p. 66). Later, Mallory recalls his days in America searching for fossils as ones both full of danger and hardship. Later, we also find that Mallory, to finance his search, smuggled guns to the Indians and the Mexicans in their wars against various American factions. To see England cast in this light — a light traditionally reserved for America, despite England's having administered an empire — only emphasizes the radically different America that exists in this Steampunk novel.

The sole American in *The Difference Engine*, other than the referential "native savages" and the thuggish Texians, is the unsubtle "Ms. Helen America" ["Hell in America"], a lesbian Communard playwright from Manhattan who, illiterate and gold-toothed, is pointedly rude and transparently manipulative, a striking contrast to the presence of the Japanese Arinori who, dressed in a tuxedo at midday, "bowed before her in the European fashion" (p. 363).

The hybridization fantasy type takes, in *The Difference Engine* a secondary, almost negligible role, compared to the other Cyberpunk fantasy types reiterated in the novel. Because of the Steampunk setting parameters, the interior conflict between man and machine, so prevalent the Cyberpunk text, is almost non-existent here. The technology described is so new, in the case of *The Difference Engine*, that Gibson and Sterling are prohibited from delving too deeply into this, one of the primary Cyberpunk fantasies. One way can be seen in the way the characters are portrayed; perhaps they are not the "highly complicated automata," that Olsen (1995) sees, but they have made their bargain with technology all the same, although at a historically decreased level than that generally seen in Cyberpunk texts. Mallory's dependence and allegiance can be interpreted through the lengthy "allegory" of the loss of the clock. Mallory, after literally winning a fortune at the steam-gurney races, purchases an expensive, complex clock for his younger sister, who is preparing for her upcoming wedding. Mallory, however, is being followed by Lord Egremont's agents, who accost him, beat him, and steal the clock, almost as an afterthought. Mallory then recruits Oliphant, as well as the five Japanese, to retrieve the device. The clock

represents science and technology, in this case; Mallory has it, but it is stolen from him. The proto-typical Cyberpunk Oliphant, along with the Japanese and Bligh, Oliphant's man and a Mirrorshades symbol, assist Mallory in retrieving it. It is a social hybridization, more elemental than the typical Cyberpunk man/machine conundrum, but the aim is similar, in that the technological artifact is held up in a valued place, above that of the norm. The clock is retrieved, and Mallory, who represents scientific theory and discourse in many ways, is introduced to the Japanese, who reaffirm his technical position by contrasting it with their own.

Another element of hybridization is the cavalier attitude with which Luddism is taken in the text. In a technologically charged environment such as that of the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision, Luddism would seem antithetical. In *The Difference Engine*, however, many of the characters exhibiting Cyberpunk fantasies also proclaim past allegiances to Luddism. Sybil's father, whose death at the hands of the Rad Lords motivates her to seek and use the Modus, was a prominent Luddite. Radley, a proto-Cyberpunk, recalls with fondness his youth in a Luddite street gang. "Your father knew us well," Radley explains to Sybil; "He was our patron politician, you might say" (p. 5). This correlates with the anti-authoritarian aspects of the Cyberpunk vision, if not the technical aspects; in an environment where the authorities are technically proficient — more so, in this case, than usual — the Cyberpunk answer is to emphasize anti-authoritarianism. At the same time, this does not keep the aspect of technical proficiency from being advocated; for example, despite Radley's Luddite past, he is, as Tobias points out, a kino-clacker

of some note: " There's a clacker from Manchester whose work is quite splendid — Michael Radley. I saw a show of his here in London, last winter. A lecture tour, with an American" (p. 142). Despite Radley's claims of prior Luddism, he remains, in the Cyberpunk tradition, quite technically adept.

As for the Cyberpunk fantasy theme of body-hatred, the Steampunk authors have historically portrayed Victorian England as just as drug addled as the Cyberpunk environment. In the Cyberpunk culture, drugs are emphasized not only for their ability to alter the human consciousness but also, simply, because they are illegal. Their use, then, is necessarily a rebellion against authority. In a Steampunk historical setting, however, drugs are not illegal; in fact, they are ubiquitous. Laudanum (opium dissolved in grain alcohol) is regularly prescribed for medical conditions; addiction to opiates and, since its invention, cocaine is prevalent in a Victorian setting. In seeming opposition to this, Gibson and Sterling included in *The Difference Engine* very few drug references. Although shot through with characters ordering various liquors, from Mallory's "huckle-buffs" to Oliphant's brandy, the portrayal of drug use, although common in much of Steampunk as well as Cyberpunk, is gone here.

Criticisms of the Cyberpunk Rhetorical Vision in *The Difference Engine*

Although the authors of *The Difference Engine* are considered the foremost writers in the Cyberpunk style, the novel is, despite reaffirming the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision, in many ways a critique of that same rhetorical vision. Much of that criticism does not necessarily con-

cern the Cyberpunk culture directly, but rather "the culture of technology," the rhetorical vision that is so prevalent in all science fiction and has accounted for the ever-increasing rapidity of technological culture. In this environment, the Cyberpunk reality is only the latest phase and, as Gibson and Sterling (1991) are most familiar with the vision they were instrumental in promulgating, it is within the realm of the technological, the "science fiction" culture, that they make the majority of their points. But the critiques leveled at the Cyberpunks can be at least equally applied to the technological culture.

Gibson and Sterling use *The Difference Engine* to describe the "collateral damage" the Cyberpunk culture (and through them, all technological culture) that the inclusion of technology — especially, communication technology — has brought. They make four points in the novel:

(1) Technology forces the abrogation of personal freedoms in exchange for the comforts it brings.

(2) Technology invades all aspects of cultures in which it is introduced; once assimilated, technology tends to warp that culture so as to ensure its own evolution.

(3) Technological "velocity" increases.

(4) Technology velocity increases eventually to the point that it seems to gain volition, a life its own.

By leveling their critiques along these lines, Gibson and Sterling have created in *The Difference Engine* a historically based outline of the pattern which their own, literary culture, the Cyberpunk vision, admittedly highly technical and technological, has taken. In addition, their

criticism can be applied similarly to technological cultures in general. For the players in *The Difference Engine* share with their modern day readers a telling commonality — both are necessarily products of a technologically oriented environment.

The abrogation of freedoms stimulated by the cultural pervasiveness of technology is so ubiquitous in *The Difference Engine* that it eventually becomes a part of the literary environment itself. In this, Gibson and Sterling are following in the footsteps of Huxley (1932), Orwell (1949) and other dystopian authors. Criticism of the dehumanizing effect of technology has always been a prominent theme in science fiction. Just as often, however, the beneficial aspects of technology are portrayed. In the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision, the individual member uses technology for anti-authoritarian purposes — a strike back against the loss of his freedoms.

This is not the case in *The Difference Engine*. Even the proto-Cyberpunk characters in the novel are victimized by the technology that has permeated their culture. The development of the "Rad Lords" and the concept of merit lordship, briefly debated in the text, form an overall environment for the limiting of personal freedoms. Technology, in this case, has created an overclass of scientists, academicians and the technically proficient. The point is emphasized by the practice of allocating aristocratic titles ("Lordships")to the upper level hierarchy of the burgeoning technological culture. In turn, these members of the technological overclass collectively make up a technological "overculture," who enjoy the power their culture has over that of others, based on the proficiency of the members with technology.

Gibson and Sterling, however, make the point that the Rad Lords represent a new aristocracy, based in technical proficiency and Engine technology rather than familial history. The points are made clearly in the text: Texas, Houston says, has " . . . no engines to speak of " (p. 42), and this is given as a primary explanation for the current political morass in that region. Not cultural differences, not political tyranny, but a lack of computers is to blame. Similarly, Engine-less Texas is portrayed by Gibson and Sterling as a savage place, full of dangerous Indians and degenerate Texians and Mexicans, who are at war with each other. The point here is clear — technology can be equated with civilization, and the lack thereof with barbarity.

Gibson and Sterling make the same point later in the text with the example of the Japanese. Recall that, as stated above, the Japanese ethos is almost universally lauded in the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision. It's treatment in *The Difference Engine*, although ostensibly similar to that in previous Cyberpunk texts, differs in surprising ways. On one hand, Gibson and Sterling portray the Japanese as conforming to the Cyberpunk vision — visionary, always culturally and technologically adept, and devoted to continual improvement, both individually and culturally:

> Mallory felt the eyes of the Japanese fixed on him. It was clear that the doll was no particular marvel to them. They wanted to know what he, a Briton, though of her. They wanted to know if he was impressed.
>
> "She is very impressive!" He blurted. "Especially so, given the primitive nature of Asia!"
>
> "Japan is the Britain of Asia," Oliphant said.
>
> "We know she is not much," said Mr. Yukichi, his eyes glinting.

"No, she's a marvel, truly," Mallory insisted. "Why, you could charge admission."

"We know she is not much, compared to your great British machines. It is as Mr. Oliphant says — we are your younger brothers in this world."

"We will learn," said another Japanese, speaking for the first time. He was likely the one called Arinori. "We have a great obligation to Britain! Britain opened our ports with the iron fleet. We have awaked and learnt [sic] great lesson you have teached us. We have destroyed our Shogun and his backward bakufu. Mikado will lead us now, in great new progress age" (p. 169).

Yet later, we find that Arinori and Yukichi epitomize Gibson and Sterling's critique of the technological overclass:

"We learn everything from you now," said Mr. Arinori. His face was flushed; the whiskey and heat seemed to have kindled a fire within him. "We build great schools and navies, like you. In Choshu, we have an Engine! We will buy more Engines. We will build our own Engines!"

Mallory chuckled. The queer, little foreigners seemed so young, so idealistic — intelligent, and above all sincere. He felt quite sorry for them. "Well! It's a fine dream, young sir, and does you credit! But it's no simple matter. You see, we in Britain have devoted great effort to those Engines — you might well call them the central aim of our nation! Our savants have worked on Enginery for decades now. For you, in a few short years, to achieve what we have done . . ."

"We will make whatever sacrifice is necessary," said Mr. Yukichi, calmly.

"There are other ways to improve the homeland of your race," Mallory said. "But what you propose is simply impossible!"

"We will make whatever sacrifice is necessary." (pp. 169-70, bold in text)

Here we see not only the frailty of the technological culture, but

Gibson and Sterling level their criticism at the essence of Cyberpunk culture as well — the technology in which the culture, both that of the Rad Lords as well as that of the Cyberpunks (and through them all of science fiction culture) is based has warped that culture and perpetuated the technological at the expense of the non-technological cultural aspects.

To exemplify this, Gibson and Sterling use Luddism. Historically portrayed as anti-technological, the presence of Luddites and Luddite attitudes in many of the protagonists in the novel seems in direct contradiction to the outward technophilia of the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision. It is, however, only a variation on technological subversion fantasy type. Since the Cyberpunks are masters of technological subversion — the Cyberpunk "street" subverts technology to its own use — so then does the Cyberpunk character know the weaknesses inherent in the uses of technology. At the same time, the Cyberpunk vision retains a respect for technical sophistication. This forms a feedback loop of sorts in the Cyberpunk culture, where technical expertise and complexity is prized at the same time the active fantasy type advocates technical subversion — an inherent conflict within the vision. In the end, the subversion fantasy type, connected and supported as it is to the Hacker fantasy type, wins out. But the result is dissatisfaction with technology in general. By being expert in exploiting the weaknesses in technology, the Cyberpunk protagonists in *The Difference Engine* are portrayed in contrasting types, either with or without Luddite sympathies. Sybil is the daughter of a Luddite; Radley speaks of his involvement, when young, in a Luddite street gang (p. 5). Mallory, although atypical of Cyberpunk

characters, evokes on several occasions his connections to the rural area of his birth (pp. 74-75 and 149-50 for examples). Conversely, those obsessed with technology (that is, those characters without the Luddite 'tempering' expressed above) seem destined for bad ends in *The Difference Engine*. Oliphant, perhaps the most Cyberpunk of the characters, is we learn later stricken with syphilis and, in the end, travels to America, a wild and uncivilized place, both geographically and politically. Bartlett and Swing similarly descend, by gradations as the novel progresses, until they are either killed (in Bartlett's case, by her own *vitriolage*) or captured to be dispatched later.

At the same time, Gibson and Sterling add that the Cyberpunk culture they see is more Oliphant than Radley. "There are no more Luddites," Fraser explains to Mallory after they come across more of Swing and Bartlett's terrorism. "They are as dead as your dinosaurs" (p. 187). But perhaps the most telling incidence of this is in the case of the Japanese contingent. Yukichi and Arinori are willing to "make whatever sacrifice is necessary" (p. 170) to obtain the level of technological sophistication of the British. Later, Arinori proclaims the Japanese language is unsuited for technological advancement — it is, according to Arinori, "of no use in the great world beyond our islands. Soon power of steam and the Engine must pervade our land. English language, following such, must suppress any use of Japanese," (p. 360). Typically, the Cyberpunk literature holds the nature and culture of the Japanese in high esteem; to find them portrayed here as technologically obsessed as a culture, and willing to sacrifice major elements of their culture for continued technological advancement, says much about the authors

attitudes about the technophilia of that culture but also of the authors' culture as well.

In addition to pointing out technology's capacity for "warping" culture, Gibson and Sterling claim that technology warps both individuals and, later, history itself. Steampunk fiction integrates actual historical personalities as characters into its stories. Powers (1989) writes on the relationship between Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron. Both serve as protagonists in *The Stress of Her Regard*. In *The Difference Engine*, we similarly see this element. Most obviously, the hierarchies of the Rad Lords are populated with the names of 19th century scientists — Darwin, Ada Byron, Engels, and Babbage himself. Without Babbage, after all, the Engine itself does not exist.

But *The Difference Engine* alters this recursiveness. In Steampunk, the personalities and circumstances are often changed in some way to better fit the plotline. To continue the Powers (1989) comparison, in *The Stress of Her Regard* we find Byron and Shelley engaged in psychosexual relationships with atypical vampires and succubi. Yet in many ways, the protagonists' actual historical circumstances — Byron's penchant for swimming, Shelley's frequent trips to Italy — remain true to the historical record in the literary text. History, in Steampunk, plays an extremely important role, and the Steampunk authors exercise great care with it.

Not so in *The Difference Engine*. Many historical characters are found here, but the circumstances in which Gibson and Sterling place them break from the Steampunk rule. Sam Houston, an American hero, is reduced to modest circumstances, and hated in his homeland to the extent

that The Angel of Goliad tries to assassinate him. But more telling is the circumstances in which we find the recursive character which, in Gibson and Sterling's opinions as writers themselves, best represent the flower of British culture: John Keats.

Gibson and Sterling introduce Keats relatively early in the novel, but not, as one might expect, for his writing. Instead, Keats has become a kino-clacker, a moderately successful one, programming multimedia displays for entertainment. Sybil encounters him at Houston's lecture, where he, after rescuing her from a faint, mentions that he is there to view the kinotropy that accompanied the speaker: "The techniques employed here are of some special interest! While the screen's resolution is quite modest, and the refresh-rate positively slow, remarkable effects have been secured, one presumes through algorithmic compression — but I fear that is all a bit technical" (p. 47). Later, Tobias answers Mallory that, despite having heard of Keats' kinotropic reputation, he is "old" and dismisses him. In addition, despite that *The Difference Engine* is set in 1855, Keats — who died in 1821 — appears in the text.

The point here seems to be that history has been changed substantially by the introduction of the Engine. Gibson and Sterling are subtly making the point that technology modifies history through the modification of the potential future. For us, the time and environment of *The Difference Engine* is the past. For Mallory or Oliphant, it is their *present*. Their *future* had been changed by the introduction of the Engine. It is in the relationship between the actual Keats and the literary Keats where we see Gibson and Sterling's point: that the players of history are necessarily products of their technological environment. Because of the intro-

duction into the technological environment of the Engine, Keats' life — and to us, Keats' *history* — was changed. Gibson and Sterling are saying that, simply by membership in a technological culture or proximity to that culture, future (and therefore, historical) events and outcomes are modified. So, while Keats dies in 1821 after writing volumes of poetry in *our* history, *his* future has been modified by the introduction of the Engine in the text. Therefore, Keats lives to 1855, he writes no poetry, and he becomes a kino-clacker. Gibson and Sterling hope here to make their culture realize that the same is occurring — prospective Keats', whose future is modified by the technology their culture has produced, prevents them from becoming the poet rather than the clacker. The creative individuals within the culture, formerly instrumental in the perpetuation of that culture, are relegated by technology to employing their creativity in its service.

A corollary to this is the concept of obsolescence, or "technological velocity." Because technology makes demands of cultures that integrate it, the level of technology — both the complexity and volume — in that culture tends to increase. As the culture matures, the technology level increases and more individuals are relegated to the service of its technology. In turn, such servants contribute to the cultural-technological presence, resulting in increased technological velocity. The higher the level of technological velocity, the faster old technology becomes obsolete.

Gibson and Sterling refer often to obsolescence in the text. Mallory, while observing the bookmakers keeping track of bets with Engines, remembers how his father's trade, hat making, was ended by the applica-

tion of Engine technology to weaving. Later, after Godwin's steam-gurney, newly "line-streamed," wins the race, Mallory pronounces the other gurneys "relics" (p. 98). "Machine-made" beer has superseded the old, traditionally brewed version — and Mallory believes the world better for it (p. 231). Gibson and Sterling are trying to show that technological velocity increases from the moment the technology is introduced and the "relics" Mallory speaks of can be people as well as things. Disraeli has been rendered obsolete by the technology of the Engine. His future, to be a voice of the Industrialized worker in Parliament, has been eradicated and, therefore, he becomes a feature writer in the technological culture of the Rad Lords. Keats, in an effort to avoid obsolescence, throws off his primary future as a poet and instead he becomes a kino-clacker. But later, as Tobias tells us, Keats is "old" — despite having made a place for himself in the technological culture, he is again rendered obsolete by the velocity of the technology.

The Stink and The Modus — Catastrophe and Technology

Two elements wind throughout *The Difference Engine*, both driving the plot and mirroring the action within; the Stink, and the Modus. For Gibson and Sterling, they are the two sides of the same technological coin.

The Modus is the driving element behind all action in the story. Ostensibly an Engine program to aid gamblers, the reader later learns that the Modus is a prototype program for the tabulation of variables and prediction of random events. In Chapter 1, Sybil steals the Modus from a dying Radley and takes it to France, where it is run on the largest Engine, the "Grand Napoleon," causing, we learn later, "disturbances in

the higher functions" of the French Engine (p. 387). After that, the Modus comes back to Britain, where it finds sits way into the possession of Swing and Bartlett through Ada Byron. However, Mallory's sense of gallantry prompts him to accost Swing and, eventually, acquire the Modus. Swing begins to bedevil Mallory is numerous ways to re-acquire the Modus. Mallory hides it in the skull of the Land Leviathan in the museum where he resides. Mallory and Bartlett later kill swing, after learning the resting place of the Modus from Byron, dies attempting to retrieve it. Mallory gives the Modus to Oliphant, who in turn gives it to his superiors at the Central Statistics Bureau, whom we are led to believe run it on their engines. In short, the plot of *The Difference Engine* is in many ways the story of the search for the Modus. But never in the text is the Modus program described, and its overall purpose is never presented.

What is the Modus? "Thick punch-card packs in glued brown paper" that are covered with "intricate perforations" (p. 69). For Gibson and Sterling, however, the Modus is much more. It is a proto-artificial intelligence, capable of performing the vast calculations necessary to predict future events. It is also the archetypal "carrot," the somewhat mysterious but valuable item that has driven the plots of numerous films and stories.

But for Gibson and Sterling, the Modus represents technology — not only mundane, everyday technology, but also and especially the world-changing technology that occasionally comes into being. In *The Difference Engine*, the Engine itself is one version of this; the Modus is the next step in the evolution of Engine technology, and the end result of the increasing

technological velocity taking place in 1855 Britain.

Gibson and Sterling, by charting the progress of the Modus through the text, also chart the progression of technology in Cyberpunk culture as they see it beginning to occur. Radley, the earliest version of the Cyberpunk we see in the text, has possession of it near the beginning of the novel. How he comes into possession of it we never find out, but he seems unaware of its real use and value, at the same time he tries to sell it to the highest bidder, Rudwick the academic or Houston the banished Texian. In the end, Houston comes into possession of it — and is nearly killed, because of his reputed treachery. The reaction toward technology as modified by the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision remains intact with Radley — moderately facile, the Cyberpunk Radley delivers the technology not to authority, represented by Rudwick (a Rad Lord), but to Houston, representative of the technological underclass. But the underclass, because of past actions that were necessary to be in a position to receive the technology, is branded a traitor and attacked. Gibson and Sterling are saying the technological underclass has paid too high a price for the opportunity to join the technological culture — they have, in their effort to increase their techno-cultural velocity artificially, become traitors to the culture itself. The overclass, in the part of Rudwick, continues to enjoy its base pleasures (e.g., betting on rat-fights) and remain unaware of the plight of the technologically poor.

This says to the Cyberpunk culture that its technological anti-authoritarianism is for naught. The Promethean tendency of the Cyberpunk vision to bring technology to the "street" only contributes, according to Gibson and Sterling, to the self-destructive cultural desire for technological

surfeit. Like Mallory's discussion with the Japanese, in which he states that British technicians have worked with Engines for year to achieve the level of technological sophistication they enjoy, the concept of delivering "outlaw tech" to a technological underclass, so highly placed in the hierarchy of Cyberpunk rhetoric, fails to take into account a culture's technological maturing process, and is therefore contributory to technological velocity in *all* cultures.

In Chapter 2, we begin to see Gibson and Sterling re-iterating their feelings concerning the corruptive influence of technology on those that contribute to its inception, and the "life" that technology seems to take. Mallory is off for a day of gambling at the steam-gurney races — a technological enthusiasm, combining elements of science and sport. He sees Lady Ada Byron, "The Queen of Engines" (p. 95) and, although never confirmed, the suspected author of the Modus, dressed and veiled in black and accompanied by ruffians Swing and Bartlett. Upon seeing Byron struck, Mallory steps in to defend her, asking if she would like him to hold the box containing the Modus cards for her. She agrees; Swing attacks and is repulsed, and Mallory subsequently leaves with the Modus.

Ada is not only The Queen of Engines, a historical mother-fantasy, but she is the Pandora as well, carrying the box that holds technology. Her funereal clothing is an indication of both her fear and her understanding of this. Ada, with her "child," the Modus, in her hands, is yet in mourning — not for herself, but for the culture to which her child is going. Mallory, seeing the technological mother in distress from those

who would use technology for their own gain (formerly a Cyberpunk fantasy) comes to the rescue and takes the Modus. Mallory is, therefore, representative of a technological guardian — intelligent, moral, chivalrous, in many ways innocent, an educated gambler, trusting of friends, family and the things of the past. This is what Gibson and Sterling say is necessary to prevent technological velocity from increasing too fast. In Mallory's hands, the Modus is disarmed, locked later in the skull of a dinosaur — a remnant of the past — for safekeeping. Again, this flies in the face of the traditional Cyberpunk vision, in which technological velocity is embraced.

But in the next chapter, Gibson and Sterling show, by increments, Mallory's innocence lost. In an effort to return the Modus to its rightful owners, Mallory admits to Oliphant, a journalist and, we later find, a secret policeman, that he ran guns for the British government to America to finance his scientific expedition. He finds he is being considered for a Lordship. He argues with his superiors in vain over the level of intrigue in academe. He learns of the workings of the Central Statistics Bureau from Tobias. Swing's men physically attack him. His sexuality is piqued by recollections of an Indian prostitute. He learns from Fraser there are no more Luddites to blame when trouble strikes. The Modus, we learn, is probably a gambling program. Ada's wagering debts are large, and Oliphant tells Mallory that she, the object of his gallantry and without thought to the consequences, has apparently put her prodigious intellect to designing an Engine program that will cause untold mayhem within the gambling industry. By chapter 4, Mallory has taken up with the prostitute Hetty for a lengthy debauch culminating in Mallory's hasty departure after walking, spent and penniless, across a

urine-soaked floor.

At each turn, Gibson and Sterling gradually remove Mallory's virtues; the longer he is in possession of the Modus, the further he descends. One by one, Mallory's (and so the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision's) illusions are stripped away. Mallory the ground-breaking scientist is also a smuggler for the government, while later his work digging up dinosaurs eventually results in his being offered a Lordship — Mallory has, in effect, been co-opted, and offered financial and cultural rewards in return for his virtues. Once inside, Mallory's naivete is quickly eliminated:

> Huxley grasped his own lapels, two-handed, a gesture of deep sincerity. "Whether I have the Lordship or not, I can say one thing: I have left my case to stand on its own strength. I have never asked for special favor. If the title is mine, it is not through any intrigue of my own."
>
> "Intrigue does not enter into it!" Mallory said.
>
> "Of course it does!" Huxley snapped. Though you'll not hear me say it publicly."

And later:

> For the first time since Canada, Mallory felt himself back in his true world, in the cleaner, higher plane that Huxley's mind inhabited. "Danger of what kind?" he asked belatedly.
>
> "Moral danger. Physical danger as well. There is always hazard in the struggle for worldly power. A Lordship is a political post. Party and Government, Ned. Money and Law. Temptation, perhaps ignoble compromise . . . The nation's resources are finite; competition is sharp. The niche of Science and Education must be defended; nay, expanded!" Huxley smiled grimly. "Somehow we must grasp the nettle. The alternative would be to lie still and let the devil have his way with the world to come. And I for one should rather burst to pieces, than see Science prostituted!" (pp. 118-19)

Everything Mallory holds dear, including his Cyberpunk character-

istics, is either proved false or devalued in Chapters 3 and 4. He, rather than being the conservative guardian of technology that Gibson and Sterling introduced, sinks further into vice. Gibson and Sterling are reiterating the fantasy of "power corrupts," but they are also showing what they believe the Cyberpunks have become. Rather than relying on the strength of their naivete, the Cyberpunk culture has been co-opted, according to Gibson and Sterling, by the very forces it was meant to antagonize — authority, government, bureaucracy, and the non-Cyberpunk techno-cultural elite.

As Mallory continues his downward slide, Swing, recalling Radley's variety of Cyberpunk, escalates his antagonism in his attempt to retrieve the Modus. When Swing strikes at Mallory's younger sister, nearing her wedding day, Mallory with his brothers and Fraser seek out Swing and attack him in his lair, eventually defeating him. Gibson and Sterling are showing here the dichotomy of the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision, a dichotomy they feel cannot be reconciled: on one side, Mallory, a moral guardian (though now corrupted and co-opted) against the abuse of technology; on the other, Swing, the archetypal Cyberpunk, adhering to the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision in his desire to wrest the Modus from those he sees as authority — the Rad Lords, in the person of Mallory.

In the end Swing is defeated, an indication that Gibson and Sterling (1991) believe that Cyberpunk had lost its effectiveness as a valid rhetorical vision. Mallory and his brothers literally walk through filth to reach Swing's lair. Swing, now going by the name "Marquess," bellows Marxist rhetoric (to which Gibson and Sterling seem to be equating Cyberpunk, two separate, now-defunct rhetorical visions) while at-

tempting to kill Mallory:

> Mallory tensed. The boy's eyes widened. "A spy." He went for his gun.
>
> Mallory punched him full in the face. As the Marquess reeled back, Mallory caught his arm and clubbed him, once, twice, across the head, with the heavy barrel of the Ballester-Molina. The Marquess fell bleeding.
>
> The Negro stood not five yards away.
>
> "I saw that," Jupiter said quietly.
>
> Mallory was silent. He leveled both guns at the man.
>
> "You struck my master. Have you killed him?"
>
> "I think not," Mallory said.
>
> The Negro nodded. He spread his open palms, gently, a gesture like a blessing. You were right, sir, and he was quite wrong. There is nothing to history. No progress, no justice. There is nothing but random horror" (p. 302).

Mallory's co-opted version of the Cyberpunk vision has, according to Gibson and Sterling, clubbed down the previous Cyberpunk vision using technology that, as Oliphant says to Fraser, is "emblematic of our current situation" (p. 380). The situation: Technology has no cultural history, no past. Constantly changing and causing change, no blame can be laid, with any assurance, for its effects within the culture. Gibson and Sterling are saying, in effect, that the technology the Cyberpunk culture embraced and imagined it had brought to heel was, in fact, brought to heel itself like the other technology-using cultures the Cyberpunks contrasted themselves against. Like Mallory, Gibson and Sterling believe the culture has been co-opted. In this case the Modus, the "method," technology itself, has done the co-opting, and the Cyberpunks, rather than taking what they wish technologically and leaving the rest, have

instead sacrificed elements of their culture for continued technological proficiency and their perceived rank in the hierarchy of technology-using cultures.

Near the end of the novel, Mallory turns over the Modus to Oliphant who, we find later, is a policeman in the "Special Branch" police, who reports to the Central Statistics Bureau chiefs, the Rad Lords themselves. Oliphant turns the Modus over to them, only later learning the Modus program had been run in France, to unnerving results. It is Oliphant that represents the new Cyberpunk rhetorical vision. Gibson and Sterling have combined elements of both Mallory (a guardian, servant of the status quo) and Radley/Swing (the original Cyberpunk vision: anti-authoritarianism, technological proficiency) to describe Oliphant. Technology is not as much an issue with Oliphant as is service — who does the Cyberpunk serve? Government? The people? Technology itself? This is the question that remains unanswered by Gibson and Sterling. Prior to *The Difference Engine*, the Cyberpunk culture served itself, but that rhetorical vision causes its own difficulties through lack of direction. As it matures, the vision must evolve, say Gibson and Sterling.

In the end, Oliphant could not serve his government masters and the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision. He locates Sybil in France and, admitting what he knows of Egremont and the Rad Lords' tyrannical activities, joins her in exacting an undescribed revenge. Oliphant returns to the anti-authoritarian fantasy of the original Cyberpunk vision, while retaining the aspect of moral guardianship that Mallory exhibited. This is the new Cyberpunk rhetorical vision that Gibson

and Sterling advocate through the text.

The Modus becomes, over time, the All Seeing Eye that Oliphant describes. Ada sees it in as she looks in a mirror, near the end of the novel:

> It is 1991. It is London. Ten thousand towers, the cyclonic hum of a trillion twisting gears, all lair gone earthquake dark in a mist of oil, in the frictioned heat of intermeshing wheels. Black seamless pavements, uncounted tributary rivulets for the frantic travels of the punched-out lace of data, the ghosts of history loosed in this shining necropolis. Paper-thin faces billow like sails, twisting, yawning, tumbling through the empty streets, human faces that are borrowed masks, and lenses for the Eye . . .
>
> In this City's center, a thing grows, an auto-catalytic tree, in almost-life, feed through the roots of thought on the rich decay of its own shed images, and ramifying, through myriad lightning branches, up, up toward the hidden life of vision,
>
> Dying to be born. The light is strong, the light is clear; the Eye at last must see itself.
>
> Myself . . .
>
> I see: I see, I see
>
> I ! (pp. 428-29)

In the 250 years since the Engine, Gibson and Sterling show, technology finally shrugs of the necessity of man and becomes self-aware. London has become a city of one, the Eye itself. Humans have become superfluous or, worse, appendages for technology. This is perhaps the most significant critique that Gibson and Sterling (1991) levy against the Cyberpunk rhetorical vision — that there is a hidden cost to technology. It can be both good and evil, and that there is a limit to what technology may do to augment a culture, a law of diminished returns wherein technological velocity unchecked becomes more likely to do

harm than good. At the same time, Ada sees this in a mirror. Gibson and Sterling (1991) are saying that our cultures *become* our technology, an end in themselves, and live, grow and reproduce as does the 1991 Modus.

As the Modus powers the plot, so does the Stink mirror the corruption within the characters themselves. Using the weather conditions in a story setting to set the tone of the characters' thoughts is an oft-used literary vehicle. But the Stink — a wave of pollution that sweeps over London during the course of the novel — is for Gibson and Sterling representative not only of the characters inner turmoil but also the harmful side of technology unchecked.

The Stink is most closely associated with Mallory; it is he who first notices its beginnings. When Mallory, after admitting his corruption to Oliphant, returns to the Museum, he encounters a " . . . potent stench here, a cloacal reek, like burning vinegar" (p. 115). Later, as the stench becomes a citywide disaster, Mallory finds himself with the prostitute Hetty. But, in the worst of the Stink, Mallory ventures forth to do battle with Swing.

What Mallory sees is during the Stink is Gibson and Sterling's method of criticizing the effects of technology unfettered within the culture. Mallory is a devotee of Catastrophe — his research seems to show that the dinosaurs died out, not gradually, but in a short time, a catastrophe. The London Stink echoes his scientific thoughts. As the Stink worsens, the civility of both Mallory and the rest of London similarly declines. Mallory is roused to action by Swing's attack on his sister. The rest of London, however, is not so vigorous in its defense:

> He walked a block, and then another. There was scarcely a window intact. Cobbles, grubbed up from the side streets, had been flung right and left like a shower of meteors. A seeming whirlwind had descended on a nearby grocery, leaving the street ankle-deep in dirty snowdrifts of flour and sugar. (p. 238)

The Stink continues, emanating from the Thames. Gibson and Sterling never explain in the text the cause of the Stink. It is a side effect of some aspect of the Engine that is never described. But the criticism is the same, echoing that of the Modus: technology is not, say Gibson and Sterling, without its price. The cultural environment is the ostensibly the victim, but the effect of the Stink on the Londoners is the real critique.