VT|UHR VIRGINIA TECH | UNDERGRADUATE HISTORICAL REVIEW

Nolan, Bryce. "Oracles of the Internet: Gibson, Stephenson, and the Elevation of Cyberpunk Literature." *The Virginia Tech Undergraduate Historical Review* 9, no. 1 (2020): pp. 1–8.

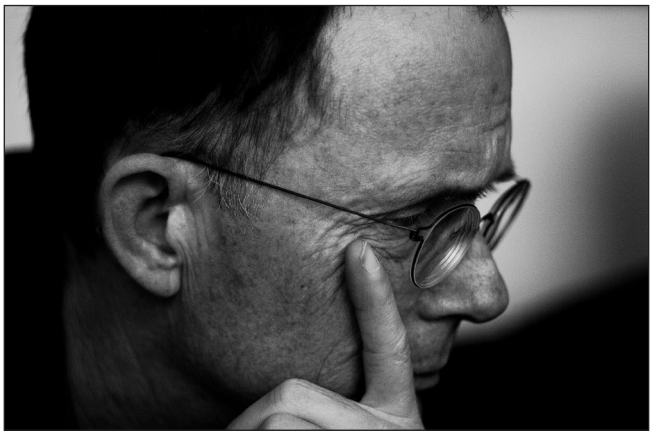
RESEARCH

Oracles of the Internet: Gibson, Stephenson, and the Elevation of Cyberpunk Literature

Bryce Nolan
Virginia Tech, US
brycen3@vt.edu

The world of science fiction, from its inception in the early 1920s, had always been something of an embarrassment to the established literary community. Traditional literary elites regarded it as a genre of cheap hacks and overused clichés. Not until the publication of such works as *Neuromancer* by William Gibson and *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson did critics and the public at large begin looking more favorably at the world of science fiction. This change occurred due to the literary and futuristic ambitions of the aforementioned authors. The common themes and aesthetic of their work pioneered a new subgenre that would come to be called "Cyberpunk."

Reviewers and other writers began to accept, celebrate, and analyze these authors and their works. Newspapers identified the influence of these works and their authors in both the arts, particularly film, and society at large in the form of the nascent internet. This was the first instance of science fiction being treated as anything other than a novelty by the general public, bringing science fiction to the forefront of literary fiction and cementing it as a worthy branch of literature. Therefore, it can be said that newspapers were instrumental in establishing this newfound acclaim. Furthermore, the works of these two authors were responsible for integrating science fiction into the modern literary canon.



William Gibson, 2008. Photo by Gonzo B. Image cropped. https://www.flickr.com/photos/45853044@N00/2341227331/.CCBY-SA2.0:https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/.

Before the mid-1980s, the literary establishment considered science fiction to be a tangential nub of literature, a genre in which no serious writer would dare to tread. Science fiction spent much of its history on the periphery of modern literature. It has only begun to make real gains in the literary world within the last forty years. While it is fair to say that the earliest writings of science fiction were by no means high quality literature, not until the 1980s did the genre come to the forefront of the public consciousness. This decades-long phase of genre obscurity was the result of a tacit understanding among the general readership that, for all its good traits, science fiction writing was generally poor and its writers were hardly professional stylists. Publishers such as Hugo Gernsback bore the brunt of this critique. The stigma followed science fiction all the way to the publication of the novels of William Gibson and Neal Stephenson, who were two of the first science fiction authors recognized as literary talents beyond the world of science fiction itself.

However, during the mid-1980s, the rise of a new form of literary science fiction challenged and subverted virtually every stereotype associated with its parent genre: cyberpunk. Cyberpunk brought a new level of literary acclaim, cultural relevance, and moral seriousness to science fiction, a genre typically defined by the unbelievable and the simplistic. It eschewed the operatic grandeur and pulpy overtones of its ancestors in favor of the granular and the stark. This was the brainchild of a small, devoted group of science fiction writers, such as William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, and John Shirley. These writers fostered the public's imagination

about the potential of technology in ways that made innovations such as the internet both realistic and believable. In particular, Gibson's and Stephenson's work provided various conceptions of eventual technological achievement and, due to the ubiquity of their ideas in popular discourse, helped elevate science fiction into mainstream literature.

Within the science fiction community itself, cyberpunk has been the topic of much discussion and debate regarding its place within the genre. These discussions typically concern the subgenre's radical departure from established norms of science fiction as well as its real-world implications, especially implications regarding the encroaching influence of technology on the lives of ordinary people. The noted astrophysicist and science fiction author David Brin, for example, has long been a skeptic of the movement, though he has conceded that the subgenre "was probably the finest free promotion campaign ever waged on behalf of science fiction. Brilliantly managed, and backed by some works of estimable value, it snared and reeled in countless new readers, while opening fresh opportunities in Hollywood and the visual arts."[1] Writers such as Brin may have been convinced that cyberpunk was a fad, but even he understood the genre's impact on science fiction and society at large.

Cyberpunk was also, naturally, a focal point for science fiction fan culture as well. Lawrence Person, editor of the Hugo-nominated science fiction fanzine *Nova Express*, stated, "Cyberpunk realized that the old SF [common abbreviation of *science fiction*] stricture of 'alter only one thing and see what happens' was hopelessly outdated, a doctrine rendered irrelevant by the furious pace of late 20th century technological change. … Cyberpunk carried technological extrapolation into the fabric of everyday life."[2] This example helps to show the significance of cyberpunk within the broader context of speculative fiction. Cyberpunk was the movement that helped to bring science fiction into mainstream discourse, dramatically increasing its profile.

Science fiction often gave readers a glimpse of the future, a peek through the cracked door of innovation and invention. However, through its early history, science fiction garnered a reputation for shoddiness and was relegated to the pulp magazines during the 1930s and 1940s. Hugo Gernsback, editor of the *Amazing Stories* magazine, which gave birth to popular science fiction and galvanized many of the negative tropes associated with the genre, endorsed this status of the genre as a place for gimmicky, conceptually simple tales of scientific wonder. The magazine introduced camp (a sense of overt theatricality), bizarre monsters, and subpar writing to skeptical readers, especially professional critics, who disregarded and indeed condemned it as hackwork and escapism, cementing cultural attitudes towards speculative fiction and creating a barrier that it was forced to overcome in order to be accepted.[3]

Art is typically a reflection of reality, and what makes science fiction so unique is its ability to distort the reader's current vision of reality into something just recognizable enough that we accept it as a possibility. But this vision of reality is also drastically different in ways that are meant to both fuel the reader's imaginative visions as well as make them fear the uncertainty of a chaotic future. Few genres come as close to realizing some people's worst fears as cyberpunk. The way an audience reacts to a specific piece of art defines the role that piece of art plays both in their minds and in society. These reactions also define their acceptance and acclaim regarding art. Works that do not inspire individuals or engender visible controversy are not written about. Works that provide ample opportunity for deep contemplation play a vital role in society's intellectual discourse. The inclusion of science fiction into this canon of art is a significant step for a genre that seeks to uplift readers' imaginations beyond their current circumstances. Through the development of cyberpunk literature, a number of authors engaged the world in a serious discussion regarding the literary and cultural merit of science fiction.

Cyberpunk brought a new level of sophistication and coolness to science fiction and breathed life into new areas of discussion about human potential. It envisioned a future when governments have evaporated and been replaced by the casual whims of the market, when overdeveloped, sprawling cities cover entire fractions of continents, and all the big players are megacorporations that dominate every aspect of modern life. These fears were especially poignant at the time because of the Reagan administration's policies that provided ever more concessions to market players. Many believed that these large companies were better equipped to deal with economic and social issues.[4] The fear of the complete privatization of society, run for profit by megacorporations, was thus a major theme that lay under most major cyberpunk works. This theme underpinned many others, such as environmental decay, gang violence, and income inequality.

The most important aspect of cyberpunk, however, is that it made science fiction literary, causing an explosion of popular recognition for this new genre. The two most important contributors to the genre were William Gibson, author of the Sprawl trilogy, consisting of *Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), and Neal Stephenson, author of *Snow Crash* (1992).[5] They supported this climb to the summit of cultural and literary significance by exploring the themes and scenarios that would not only come to form cyberpunk as a subgenre, but also spoke to the fears and concerns of readers at the time.

The works of William Gibson and Neal Stephenson came about in a post–World War II environment where unevenly distributed prosperity, anxiety over the prospect of nuclear war, and huge leaps in the potential of technology were all major themes of the time. Thus, it is not hard to see why such ideas feature so prominently in their works. The theme of urban decay also came to the forefront of public consciousness at this time, as the supposed ubiquitous growth of the United States' standard of living did not affect the major urban areas in any significant way. With this in mind, the American city became, in the eyes of the media at large,

a place of danger, of always looking over one's shoulder.[6] Cyberpunk cityscapes are wastelands in the midst of a slow collapse of ordered society, where a select few lord over those who live on the streets. This status quo draws parallels to the state of American cities as mentioned above, solidifying a connection between present and future that many readers could reasonably see and understand as possible. By extending the problems of the present to their possible logical conclusions in the future, these works spoke to the concerns of farsighted readers who were concerned about the direction the world was headed.

Such dalliances with the possibilities of the future are, of course, the purveyance of science fiction. But when these projections lean towards the cautionary rather than the fantastical, stories instead become about the dangers posed by the aspects of society that, at the time, were considered innocuous. In this way, cyberpunk is closely related to the earlier works of dystopian fiction to emerge just before and after World War II. These novels invented dictatorial regimes that could twist the people's perceptions of reality, such as George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), written to warn against global superpowers that would come to dominate the world for the latter half of the twentieth century.[7] But cyberpunk authors did seek to diverge from the dystopian and traditional speculative fiction narratives; they took issue with writing a story that included just one logical extrapolation of the current global order. They also deviated from this mold by shifting the focus of the caution away from the aftermath of nuclear proliferation and authoritarian governments (although those do factor slightly into a number of cyberpunk works) and towards the unfettered capitalism and technological milestones that lay at the heart of Western civilization.

William Gibson's work emerged in an era of science fiction dominated by the post–*Star Wars* boom, and it ushered in an age that did away with that almost entirely. This was a time of, as the YouTube channel Extra Credits put it, "half-baked space operas and schlocky galactic adventures." In this same video, which examines Gibson's contributions to science fiction, narrator Dan Floyd describes Gibson's role as one of revolution. For Floyd, Gibson steered the genre towards asking big questions about morality and the future, similar to what new-wave science fiction writers of the 1960s, such as Philip K. Dick and Stanisław Lem, had done.[8] It is rather fitting that this video, extolling Gibson's influence on the path of science fiction, should exist on a platform that Gibson himself predicted with surprising accuracy, coining the term *cyberspace* in his most well-known short story: "Burning Chrome." Indeed, it takes quite a bit of influence and style, as well as no small degree of accuracy, to be called "the hippest and most prescient science-fiction author ever" by the *Wall Street Journal*.[9] Gibson's newfound ubiquity found him at the center of the movement, with his novels considered the foundational works of the genre.

Gibson's importance was heralded early on in his career, when his first novel, *Neuromancer*, became the first novel to ever win all three of the major awards for science fiction: the Hugo, Nebula, and Philip K. Dick Awards.[10] Through widespread media coverage of his work, as well as in-depth profiling of the author himself, cyberpunk and its themes began to enter the public forum. A common thread, some might say a cliché, of these author profiles is just how little Gibson fulfilled preconceptions regarding his appearance, being a bespectacled, lanky southerner with a soft voice as opposed to a figure more closely resembling the hard-bitten characters he created. Joel Garreau, writing for the *Washington Post*, described Gibson's shirts as looking like they came from a feedstore.[11] What was perhaps more significant about this article is its focus on what those works of literature did to Gibson's public image. The article itself contained two separate photographs of the author, one of which is a waist-up shot around which the article is framed. These seemingly glamorous framings reinforce the focus of the article on Gibson as a person as opposed to his skills as a writer. Parts of the article described when the White House recognized Gibson as a prophet of technological advancement. As a whole, the article presented Gibson as a man whose work accurately predicted technologies that became integral to the way the modern world functioned, specifically how the internet would change the way humans would interact with information as well as each other.

Gibson's work influenced a number of other works outside of literary fiction, and the papers jumped on these newer works with just as much zeal as they previously had on Gibson and his work. A 1990 article in the *New York Times* identified a number of artistic works—including the anime film *Akira*, the American movie *RoboCop*, and an opera based on the Philip K. Dick novel *Valis*—that had been influenced by Gibson, who was customarily introduced at the beginning of the article along with his first novel. This article pointed to cyberpunk as a growing artistic trend beyond just literature, found in punk bands in Germany as well as animators in Japan, that did not just borrow the themes and aesthetics of the movement Gibson had started but also made them manifest beyond words on pages. Gibson's narratives and themes had sparked creative inspiration and the creation of specifically referential works of art in a broad range of industries, which spoke to the level of cultural significance and artistic value of his work. The *Times* article recognized common threads from Gibson's work among all these disparate works from cultures across the globe, further demonstrating the growing ubiquity and cultural saturation of Gibson's vision.[12]

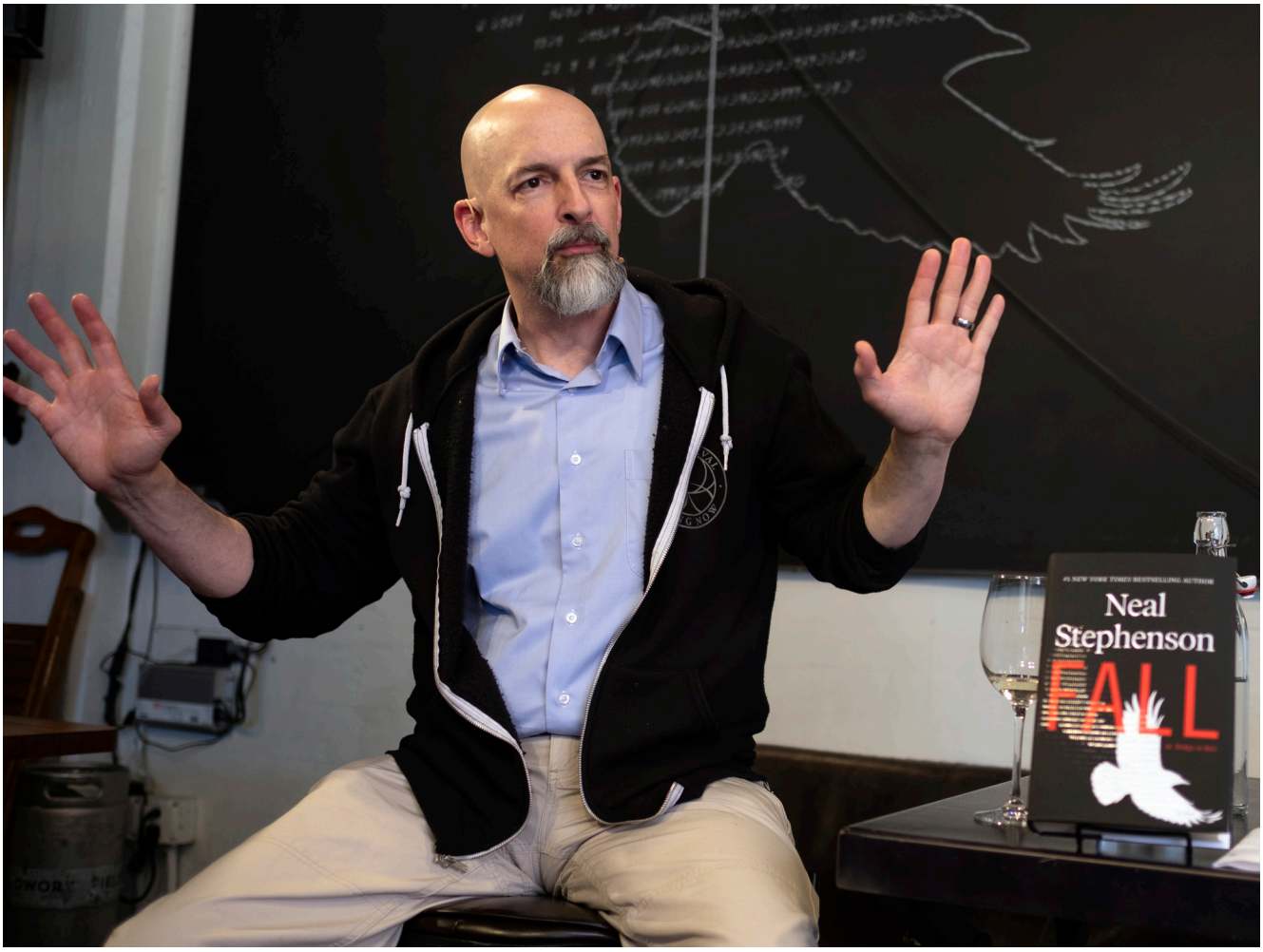
Gibson never suspected that his debut novel would become a linchpin for science fiction. In fact, he hardly even considered that it would be a success in the market. In an interview with the *Mississippi Review* in 1988, Gibson stated that his prime motivation for writing the novel, once a finished product had been promised to a publisher, was "Panic. Blind animal panic."[13] In this same interview, Gibson stated that he was "scared of being typecast if [he were to] make SF [his] permanent home."[14] Judging from his words in this

interview, one can assume that, especially in this early phase of his career, Gibson was at best apprehensive of the success of his work. He spent a good deal of the interview talking about other writers that he enjoyed, not considering his own work to be of much significance in the grand scheme of things. As far as Gibson was concerned, *Neuromancer* was a happy accident, and even then he saw himself as being on his way to something greater.

If William Gibson was the father of cyberpunk, then Neal Stephenson gave the movement one of its most comprehensive and exhaustively explored formulations with his 1992 novel, *Snow Crash*. It was, in many ways, a natural evolution of Gibson's own work, though with more humor and a world that bore just a bit closer to the absurdity of the early 1990s. According to a study written by Lisa Swanstrom, "While *Snow Crash* is concerned with depicting extremely hostile social stratification, it does so in order to satirize it, which is to say, to undermine it."[15] The novel also satirized and hyperbolized Cold War fears of nuclear annihilation through the character of the Raven, an Aleutian Islander who drives a motorcycle with a nuclear warhead in the sidecar, hell-bent on destroying America, or what is left of it.[16] The novel's send-up of the fears and escalations of this form of Cold War–era science fiction roughly coincides with the collapse of the Soviet Union.[17] But what makes this work significant is how it updates and expands Gibson's vision of the digital frontier.

Stephenson's most important contribution to technology through *Snow Crash* was the terms and architecture he used to build his digital world. As if attempting to imitate Gibson's vision of digital transference further, *Snow Crash* started life as a graphic novel that Stephenson hoped would grow into some kind of interactive online media, such as a video game.[18] Stephenson's work arrived closer to the explosion of the interactive internet, and his version of the digital secondary universe is retrospectively considered to be the most accurate prediction of the internet before the advent of the internet itself—particularly in his vision of a massive social network and customized digital avatars. These personalized online hangouts came almost scarily close to the reality of many of the internet's now popular social experiences.

One of the earliest attempts to build an online space using Stephenson's framework was undertaken by the software



Neal Stephenson, 2019, at the Interval. Photo by Christopher Michel. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Neal_Stephenson_in_2019_A_11.jpg. CC BY-SA 4.0: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/deed.en.

company blaxxun interactive. The company's name was a direct reference to an exclusive digital hangout in *Snow Crash*, the "Black Sun," which the protagonist built. One of the so-called neighborhoods that blaxxun managed was named the Metaverse, another reference to Stephenson's novel. These real-world models, however, contained only rudimentary animations, and in comparison to their fictional counterparts, they lacked the complexity of Stephenson's original vision.[19] It remains important that the attempt was made, spurring progress towards the social internet of today. This followed the spirit of both Gibson's and Stephenson's vision of an internet that large numbers of people would use on a regular basis for a wide variety of purposes.

One contemporary go-to source for digital alternative self-actualization is a massively multiplayer online game called *Second Life*. This program took direct inspiration from the Metaverse of *Snow Crash*; both the Metaverse and *Second Life* are digital universes where anyone can be or do anything in a seemingly safe online environment. The only limits to what is possible within the game are the depths of your pocket, your imagination, and your prowess with binary code.[20] The universes of these games are malleable and customizable, but not for free. Money plays a significant role in the user experiences, and as such the power to invest more of it heightens the player's ability to fine-tune the games. Daniel Grassian writes, "More so in the Metaverse than in reality, money buys special privileges and individuals can easily obtain permits and gain zoning approval for their building by greasing the appropriate palms."[21] This reliance on the use of real-world currency in order to improve the user's digital experience drew upon the theme of egregious income inequality that both Gibson and Stephenson had incorporated into their work. A key difference was that, in the real-life digital playgrounds, such as *Second Life*, real-money transactions that procured unfair advantages for particular users were a feature, not a bug, and these so-called "microtransactions" were tremendous sources of profit for digital publishers. The publisher EA (Electronic Arts) made over 1.3 billion dollars from downloadable content in 2015 alone.[22] One of the most expensive digital items ever sold was a virtual copy of the city of Amsterdam created for the service. It sold for $50,000 on eBay.[23] *Second Life* was therefore a prime example of these monetization practices, and in the wide world of digital experiences, it came closest to replicating Stephenson's vision from *Snow Crash*. *Second Life* presented a modern take on the Metaverse, a digital manifestation of a concept that previously existed only on paper.

While both Gibson and Stephenson presented similar formulations of an interactive digital data network, the key distinction between their work with regards to cyberspace was how they differently envisioned the structures of the internet. Stephenson's Metaverse was a place for people to meet, while Gibson's earlier cyberspace was defined as a place of raw visualized data populated by isolated hackers, referencing earlier detective fiction by portraying the central character as a lone fighter lost in an endless urban sprawl.[24] Whereas Gibson's internet was an outlet where people could go to escape, Stephenson's cyberspace took the form of a place where people would go to interact. Real-world computer programs embraced this shift, with *Second Life* presenting digital alternatives to real-world mingling. This emphasis on interaction represented an important shift in the way critics interpreted cyberpunk works from Gibson to Stephenson. While, more broadly, SF could be read as prescient predictions of what might be if someone eventually managed to create such technological marvels in the future, Gibson and Stephenson's works were seen as blueprints for those with the skill or determination to bring into reality the things that these authors simply put down in words.

Stephenson inherited Gibson's mantle as the unwitting and unwilling prophet of science fiction and technological advancement.[25] Just like Gibson before him, Stephenson found himself plastered on the pages of newspapers, with blown-up photographs of him taking center stage in articles devoted more to how right he was about the future of technology than to his literary merit. One 1995 article described Stephenson as looking like a "cyberpunk Zorro," which painted him as a seemingly larger-than-life figure before revealing the author's shyness.[26] This was distinct from the media's impression of Gibson, who struck the press as being subdued and laidback, and yet similar in that both these profiles comment on the humble nature of these authors. This generational succession of the role of the key science fiction writer of the day pointed towards an interesting development: the idea of the science fiction author as not just a writer but also a public intellectual whose ideas were meant to be engaged with on a serious level by the public.

A *New York Times* article written in 1999 was entirely consumed by Stephenson's worries about the ways in which traditional graphical user interfaces (the typical way computers present information to their users) were pointing humanity towards a global epidemic of one-dimensional thought.[27] The legitimization of these authors' points of view came from the initial critical engagement and thorough analysis of their works and their implications, putting them in a position of authority in a world that gradually adopted the ideas they formulated. Science fiction literature became a significant method of engaging with technological advancement precisely because these authors were able to ground their work in both the possible and the probable.[28]

The technological visions imagined by Gibson and Stephenson led them to become the oracles of the internet, the prophets of bandwidth. These two authors abandoned the many-eyed aliens and spandex-clad space adventurers who had become synonymous with science fiction in favor of a street-level view of the near future. By bringing the focus of their work to a future that most of their readers felt was entirely possible, even probable, and placing them in times that their readers felt they would live to see, they opened the floodgates for the discussion of science fiction on a broader

scale. Gibson and Stephenson were radicals, departing from the mainline of science fiction in favor of forging an entirely new school of thought in literature. Through the dissemination of their ideas and the media attention on their lives and works, William Gibson and Neal Stephenson cemented their subgenre into the canon of science fiction as well as helped the broader genre become more widely recognized in contemporary society.

Notes

[1] David Brin, "The Matrix: Tomorrow May Be Different," in *Exploring the Matrix: Visions of the Cyber Present*, edited by Karen Haber (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), exceprt on Davidbrin.com, http://www.davidbrin.com/nonfiction/matrix.html.

[2] Lawrence Person, "Notes Toward a Postcyberpunk Manifesto," *Nova Express* 4, no. 4 (Winter/Spring 1998), accessed using a Slashdot repost, https://slashdot.org/stoy/99/10/08/2123255/notes-toward-a-postcyberpunk-manifesto.

[3] David M. Larson, "Science Fiction, the Novel, and the Continuity of Condemnation," *Journal of General Education* 28, no. 1 (1976): 63–74; Stuart Klawans, "It All Started with Hugo Gernsback," *Chicago Tribune*, December 21, 1975, F3.

[4] Neal M. Cohen, "The Reagan Administration's Urban Policy," *Town Planning Review* 54, no. 3 (1983): 304–15.

[5] William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984); William Gibson, *Count Zero* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1986); William Gibson, *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1988); Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992).

[6] Matthew Farish, "Disaster and Decentralization: American Cities and the Cold War," *Cultural Geographies* 10, no. 2 (2003): 125–48.

[7] Andrew Hammond, "'The Twilight of Utopia': British Dystopian Fiction and the Cold War," *Modern Language Review* 106, no. 3 (2011): 662–81.

[8] "William Gibson: The 80s Revolution—Extra Sci Fi—#7," Extra Credits, December 19, 2017, video, 8:21, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhoxtWLMqD4.

[9] Dennis Kneale, "Web Weavers," *Wall Street Journal*, September 26, 1996, B8.

[10] "Tribune Books: Science Fiction Ace Has Struck Again," *Chicago Tribune*, November 18, 1988, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1988-11-18-8802170678-story.html.

[11] Joel Garreau, "Cyberspaceman," *Washington Post*, October 18, 1993, D1.

[12] John Markoff, "Art Invents a Jarring New World from Technology," *New York Times*, November 25, 1990, E5.

[13] Larry McCaffery and William Gibson, "An Interview with William Gibson," *Mississippi Review* 16, no. 2/3 (1988): 221.

[14] McCaffery and Gibson, "An Interview with William Gibson," 236.

[15] Lisa Swanstrom, "Capsules and Nodes and Ruptures and Flows: Circulating Subjectivity in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*," *Science Fiction Studies* 37, no. 1 (2010): 60.

[16] Swanstrom, "Capsules and Nodes," 61.

[17] Don Oberdorfer, "Soviet 'Collapse' Shifts the Axis of Global Politics," *Washington Post*, September 1, 1991, A35.

[18] Steve Jones, "Victorian Vision of the Future," *USA Today*, February 28, 1995, 8D.

[19] Jason Fry, "Novel Ideas," *Wall Street Journal*, November 16, 1998, R12.

[20] Keith McIntosh, "The Social Construction of Virtual Space," *Michigan Sociological Review* 22 (2008): 196–214.

[21] Daniel Grassian, "Discovering the Machine in You: The Literary, Social and Religious Implications of Neal Stephenson's 'Snow Crash,'" *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 12, no. 3 (2001): 250–67.

[22] Dave Thier, "EA Is Making a Giant Amount of Money Off Microtransactions," *Forbes*, March 3, 2016, https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidthier/2016/03/03/ea-is-making-a-giant-amount-of-money-off-microtransactions/#4a51719c5328.

[23] Randy Dotinga, "Second Life's Amsterdam Snapped Up on eBay," *WIRED*, March 26, 2007, https://www.wired.com/2007/03/second-lifes-am/.

[24] Joe Nazare, "Marlowe in Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk (Re-)Vision of Chandler," *Studies in the Novel* 35, no. 3 (2003): 383–404.

[25] John Schwartz, "Out of a Writer's Imagination Came an Interactive World," *New York Times*, December 6, 2011, D9.

[26] Paul Pintarich, "A Cyberpunk Future," *Oregonian* (Portland, OR), February 26, 1995, E05.

[27] John Markoff, "Behind Happy Interface, More Complex Reality," *New York Times*, June 3, 1999, G7.

[28] "Symposium on Digital Science Fiction," *Science Fiction Studies* 43, no. 1 (2016): 4–13.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Dotinga, Randy. "Second Life's Amsterdam Snapped Up on eBay." *WIRED*, March 26, 2007. https://www.wired.com/2007/03/second-lifes-am/.

Fry, Jason. "Novel Ideas." *Wall Street Journal*, November 16, 1998, R12.

Garreau, Joel. "Cyberspaceman." *Washington Post*, October 18, 1993, D1.

Jones, Steve. "Victorian Vision of the Future." *USA Today*, February 28, 1995, 8D.

Klawans, Stuart. "It all Started with Hugo Gernsback." *Chicago Tribune*, December 21, 1975, F3.

Kneale, Dennis. "Web Weavers." *Wall Street Journal*, September 26, 1996, B8.

Markoff, John. "Art Invents a Jarring New World from Technology." *New York Times*, November 25, 1990, E5.

Markoff, John. "Behind Happy Interface, More Complex Reality." *New York Times*, June 3, 1999, G7.

McCaffery, Larry, and William Gibson. "An Interview with William Gibson." *Mississippi Review* 16, no. 2/3 (1988): 217–36.

Oberdorfer, Don. "Soviet 'Collapse' Shifts the Axis of Global Politics." *Washington Post*, September 1, 1991, A35.

Pintarich, Paul. "A Cyberpunk Future." *Oregonian (Portland, OR)*, February 26, 1995, E05.

Schwartz, John. "Out of a Writer's Imagination Came an Interactive World." *New York Times*, December 6, 2011, D9.

Thier, Dave. "EA Is Making a Giant Amount of Money Off Microtransactions." *Forbes*, March 3, 2016. https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidthier/2016/03/03/ea-is-making-a-giant-amount-of-money-off-microtransactions/#6b477c185328.

"Tribune Books: Science Fiction Ace Has Struck Again." *Chicago Tribune*, November 18, 1988. https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1988-11-18-8802170678-story.html.

Secondary Sources

Brin, David. "The Matrix: Tomorrow May Be Different." In *Exploring the Matrix: Visions of the Cyber Present*, edited by Karen Haber. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003. Excerpt on Davidbrin.com. http://www.davidbrin.com/nonfiction/matrix.html.

Cohen, Neal M. "The Reagan Administration's Urban Policy." *The Town Planning Review* 54, no. 3 (1983): 304–15. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.54.3.l8x2286l05517704

Farish, Matthew. "Disaster and Decentralization: American Cities and the Cold War." *Cultural Geographies* 10, no. 2 (2003): 125–48. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1191/1474474003eu267oa

Grassian, Daniel. "Discovering the Machine in You: The Literary, Social and Religious Implications of Neal Stephenson's 'Snow Crash.'" *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 12, no. 3 (2001): 250–67.

Hammond, Andrew. "'The Twilight of Utopia': British Dystopian Fiction and the Cold War." *Modern Language Review* 106, no. 3 (2011): 662–81. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5699/modelangrevi.106.3.0662

Larson, David M. "Science Fiction, the Novel, and the Continuity of Condemnation." *Journal of General Education* 28, no. 1 (1976): 63–74.

McIntosh, Keith. "The Social Construction of Virtual Space." *Michigan Sociological Review* 22 (2008): 196–214.

Nazare, Joe. "Marlowe in Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk (Re-) Vision of Chandler." *Studies in the Novel* 35, no. 3 (2003): 383–404.

Person, Lawrence. "Notes Toward a Postcyberpunk Manifesto." *Nova Express* 4, no. 4 (Winter/Spring 1998). Accessed using a Slashdot repost. https://slashdot.org/story/99/10/08/2123255/notes-toward-a-postcyberpunk-manifesto.

Swanstrom, Lisa. "Capsules and Nodes and Ruptures and Flows: Circulating Subjectivity in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*." *Science Fiction Studies* 37, no. 1 (2010): 54–80.

"Symposium on Digital Science Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies* 43, no. 1 (2016): 4–13. DOI: https://doi.org/10.5621/sciefictstud.43.1.0004

"William Gibson: The 80s Revolution—Extra Sci Fi—#7." Extra Credits, December 19, 2017, video, 8:21, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhoxtWLMqD4.

About the Author

Bryce Nolan is a student at Virginia Tech majoring in history with minors in both creative writing and political science. He grew up in Radford, Virginia, as the second of three siblings and credits his lifelong fascination with history to his family. His main historical interests include the development of the cultural, artistic, and political landscapes of America, especially over the course of the twentieth century. He is a staff writer for the Collegiate Times, penning articles for its Lifestyles section, and he serves as a student editor for the VTUHR. He plans to parlay his undergraduate career into law school and to work as a constitutional attorney, focusing on civil rights.

How to cite this article: Nolan, Bryce. "Oracles of the Internet: Gibson, Stephenson, and the Elevation of Cyberpunk Literature." *The Virginia Tech Undergraduate Historical Review* 9, no. 1 (2020): pp. 1–8.

Published: 02 June 2020