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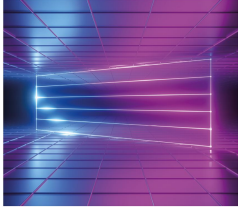
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The Mirrorshades Collective

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THE *MIRRORSHADES* COLLECTIVE

Graham J. Murphy

Literary cyberpunk's emergence in the mid-1980s is often attributed to the convergence of a quintet of authors: William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Lewis Shiner, John Shirley, and Rudy Rucker, a cadre of like-minded writers harboring rebellious attitudes toward what they perceived as the inadequacies of science fiction (sf). The members of this quintet were first drawn to one another through a variety of seemingly chance encounters coupled with admiration for one another's work. For example, essayist and editor of *Science Fiction Eye* Steven P. Brown remarks that the 1974 Clarion Writers Workshop proved instrumental because Brown first met Bruce Sterling and introduced him to equal parts author and punk rocker John Shirley. Shirley, in turn, was instrumental to Gibson's career: The two men formed a fast friendship after a Vancouver convention, and Shirley helped convince Gibson to continue writing and sending out his early short stories for publication (Brown 175). At the same time, Sterling thought highly of Rudy Rucker's writing and started a correspondence with him which led to Worldcon/Constellation (1983) where Gibson, Sterling, and Shiner partied with Rucker to celebrate his latest novel *The Sex Sphere* (1983). Rucker had known of Gibson's work, having read "Johnny Mnemonic" (1981) in *Omni*, and was "awed by the writing. Gibson, too, was out to change SF" (204). Rucker was not alone in his estimation of Gibson's abilities; for example, Sterling would later describe Gibson's influence upon them for the documentary *No Maps for These Territories* (Neale 2000) in this fashion:

When Lewis Shiner [whom Sterling met through the Turkey City Writer's Workshop] and I [...] were first reading Gibson's work in manuscript, we looked at it and said "Look, this is breakthrough material. This guy is really doing something different. Like we gotta put down our preconceptions and pick up on this guy from Vancouver. It's the way forward." A hole had opened up in consensus reality and we just saw daylight.

As a result, the first half of the 1980s was an idyllic period for this cadre, highlighted by the publication of Shiner's *Frontera* (1984), the first volume of Shirley's *Eclipse* series (1985), Sterling's Shaper/Mechanist stories (1982–84) and *Schismatrix* (1985), and Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). As Brown recounts, all "these people fed and cross-fed each other, passing around manuscripts, hammering out a vision of modern SF that more accurately reflected the future of the real world" (174–75).

Equally important as the fiction to the fledgling Movement, however, was Sterling's self-produced fanzine *Cheap Truth*, which became a polemical vehicle to critique so-called staid sf and promote the alleged revolutionary fervor of a new generation of authors looking to shake up

the establishment and sell their stories. In the first two issues of *Cheap Truth*, circa 1983, Sterling, under his *nom de plume* ‘Vincent Omniaveritas,’ describes sf as both being stuck in a “reptilian torpor” (#1) and suffering from “intellectual exhaustion” (#2). Similarly, Lewis Shiner, writing as ‘Sue Denim’ in *Cheap Truth* #10 (1985), viewed *Neuromancer*’s Nebula Award nomination for Best Novel as a battle the upstart generation was determined to win:

The voices of repression range from the senile babblings of Robert Heinlein to the California vapidity of Larry Niven to the moist-eyed urgency of Kim Stanley Robinson; arrayed against them are William Gibson, Lewis Shiner, and Jack Dann [...]. For every Heinlein that smites a Gibson, thousands more will rise in his place. The SF revolution is crying out for literacy, imagination, and humanity; it needs only a victory in the Nebulas to shatter the giant’s terracotta feet. Up against the wall, Heinlein! (#10)

Shiner and the rest of what was internally (and informally) being called the Movement witnessed the Nebula victory they longed for: Gibson’s debut novel won not only the 1985 Nebula Award for Best Novel, but also the 1985 Hugo Award and the 1984 Philip K. Dick Award. With the beauty of hindsight, we can say Gibson’s overwhelming success with *Neuromancer*, coupled with Sterling’s, Shiner’s, Shirley’s, and Rucker’s steady output, meant the Movement was destined to enter the mainstream.

The Movement authors’ early successes, however, owe much to two influential editors: Ellen Datlow and Gardner Dozois. Mike Ashley provides a thorough account of Datlow’s influence as fiction editor for *Omni* and explains that “[w]hat was typical about *Omni*’s science fiction was that it was unpredictable. It pushed boundaries, some of which readers had not even known were there. *Omni* became the pre-eminent market for those writers who were not traditional” (41). Datlow quickly became the “Queen of Punk SF” (Ashley 49), and under her leadership, *Omni*’s science fiction increasingly focused on humans interfacing with the very technologies that *Omni*’s nonfiction articles were popularizing. A few years later, Gardner Dozois wrote “Science Fiction in the Eighties” for *The Washington Post* (December 30, 1984) and (un)officially jettisoned ‘Movement’ in favor of the *cyberpunk* label:

About the closest thing here to a self-willed esthetic ‘school’ would be the purveyors of bizarre hard-edged, high-tech stuff, who have on occasion been referred to as ‘cyberpunks’—Sterling, Gibson, Shiner, [Pat] Cadigan, [Greg] Bear [...] the similarities in goals and esthetics between them are much stronger and more noticeable than the (admittedly real) differences. For one thing, they are all ambitious writers, not satisfied to keep turning out the Same Old Stuff. Once again it is a time for literary risk-taking, and once again those who take them are admirable—and that makes it an exciting time for sf as a genre.

While Dozois certainly didn’t coin the term *cyberpunk*—that honor goes to Bruce Bethke’s “Cyberpunk” (1983)—he helped popularize a pulsing punk sensibility or “spirit of the new force in sf [that] was pervading the field” (Ashley 47) that had emerged since at least the start of the 1980s. For example, a panel devoted to ‘punk sf’ cropped up at Armadillo Con (1982) where Gibson read from his work-in-progress *Neuromancer*; John Kessel delivered a lecture in 1983 to North Carolina State University on the ‘punk sf’ of Gibson and Sterling; the year after *Neuromancer*’s publication, NASFiC (North American Science Fiction Convention) featured a panel with Sterling, Shiner, Shirley, Cadigan, and Bear, and Shirley again appeared on a cyberpunk panel (with Jack Williamson, Norman Spinrad, and Gregory Benford) at the Science Fiction Research Association’s annual conference in 1985, a venue he would revisit the next year to deliver a paper “Cyberpunk or Cyberjunk?” (Heuser 231–34). These examples (among many) are testament

to cyberpunk's emergence as a potentially electrifying force in sf, and it is during this wave that Ace Books published Sterling's edited collection *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* (1986).

The *Mirrorshades* collection includes the original Movement-era cadre—Gibson, Sterling, Shirley, Shiner, and Rucker—as well as such allies as Cadigan and Bear and cyberpunk newcomers Tom Maddox, Marc Laidlaw, James Patrick Kelly, and Paul Di Filippo. *Mirrorshades*, however, is more than a collection of stories: It is also Sterling's attempt to map cyberpunk's contours and integrate competing sensibilities, and what emerges is a tension between a rebellious group of authors content to sneer at the mainstream from the margins and an increasingly popular(ized) movement that was slowly becoming the mainstream. The difficulties of trying to thread this needle between rebelliousness and respectability are plainly evident in Sterling's Preface that opens the collection. For example, Sterling is adamant at the very start of the Preface that "the 'typical cyberpunk writer' does not exist; this person is only a Platonic fiction. For the rest of us, our label is an uneasy bed of Procrustes, where fiendish critics wait to lop and stretch us" (ix). Indeed, a quick scan of the *Mirrorshades* stories is testament to Sterling's claim: The widely varied tales include militaristic artificial intelligences taking over their human hosts (Tom Maddox: "Snake-Eyes"), a chance encounter with a biogenetically engineered mermaid (Shiner: "Till Human Voices Wake Us"), bizarre vignettes about Harry Houdini (Rucker: "Tales of Houdini"), the experience of living in a futuristic street gang (Marc Laidlaw: "400 Boys"), the use of genetic intervention to try and escape mortality (James Patrick Kelly: "Solstice") or extend familial legacy (Paul Di Filippo: "Stone Lives"), the struggles of a Russian cosmonaut who finds a second chance at living aboard an aging space station (Sterling and Gibson: "Red Star, Winter Orbit"), and the weirdness of gargoyle-human hybrids seeking love (Greg Bear: "Petra"). *Mirrorshades* shows an incredibly diverse range of stories, and it is hard not to agree on some level with Martin Petto's acrimonious contention that the collection "is really just a bunch of writers who know and like each other and are involved in a loose creative web."

It is this narrative diversity or, perhaps more dismissively, incoherence that highlights another of cyberpunk's key tensions for critics, pundits, and fans alike: Did it ever offer any coherent vision of *cyberpunk* when it first exploded onto the scene in the 1980s? Michael Swanwick, for example, described Rudy Rucker as "no cyberpunk at all, but rather a one-man subgenre all by himself. However, the cyberpunks love him for his daring, excess, and clear-eyed craziness, and have claimed him as one of their own" (43); similarly, Swanwick characterized Bear as a free agent who was isolated from the Movement-era clique and "had independently invented the cyberpunks' style, and they loved him for it. He was welcomed to the ranks with open arms" (38). Gregory Benford could "see no commonality of vision between the various writers to whom the cyberpunk label had been attached beyond the fact that their fiction was 'bedazzled by technoglit'" (Ashley 52); similarly, David Brin has called cyberpunk "nothing more or less than the best publicity gimmick to come to Speculative/Fiction in years" (qtd. in Kelly 145). As a collection, even *Mirrorshades's* origins are tainted with opportunism: As James Patrick Kelly explains it, Sterling approached famed sf editor David Hartwell with an idea for a cyberpunk anthology, but was told more authors/stories were needed to publish a marketable collection. Hartwell testified Sterling "said it would be no problem to include twelve, and so he surprised people such as James Patrick Kelly, Greg Bear, and Paul Di Filippo by making them part of the Movement and including them in *Mirrorshades*" (qtd. in Kelly 145).¹ *Mirrorshades* and, more broadly, cyberpunk have therefore always struggled with the perception that it has been nothing but "a marketing strategy masquerading as a literary movement" (Benford, qtd. in Kelly 145).

In spite of such damning criticism, however, the stories in Sterling's *Mirrorshades* are no mere publicity gimmick, even if Sterling was clearly recruiting and subsequently drumming up publicity with this anthology; instead, *Mirrorshades* bears witness to the claims that early cyberpunk was tapping into a "spirit of the new force in sf [that] was pervading the field" (Ashley 47), and

there is no doubt Datlow's and Dozois's respective input in cyberpunk's earliest days coupled with Sterling's keen promotional savvy with *Mirrorshades* helped position cyberpunk at the forefront of 1980s-era movements that it might otherwise not have achieved on its own accord. While the quintessential cyberpunk author may indeed have been a Platonic fiction, Sterling's Preface was nevertheless instrumental in giving cyberpunk some coherent shape and legitimacy as it proceeded to lop and stretch the *Mirrorshades* contributors for its own purposes. For example, toning down the rebellious rhetoric of *Cheap Truth*, Sterling is careful in his Preface to explain the *Mirrorshades* authors are "steeped in the lore and tradition of the SF field" and "cyberpunk is in some sense a return to roots" (x–xi). In his most conciliatory tone, Sterling writes of cyberpunk as "a natural extension of elements already present in science fiction, elements sometimes buried but always seething with potential. Cyberpunk has risen from within the SF genre; it is not an invasion but a modern reform" (xv). While Sterling evokes such cyberpunk precursors as Harlan Ellison, Samuel R. Delany, Norman Spinrad, J.G. Ballard, and Thomas Pynchon, many of whom are addressed in the previous chapter by Rob Latham, he also gives an appreciative shout-out to "the steely extrapolation of Larry Niven, Poul Anderson, and Robert Heinlein" (x), a contrary opinion from Lewis Shiner's earlier description in *Cheap Truth* of Heinlein's 'senile babblings' and Niven's 'California vapidity.' Finally, as befits an anthology that promotes itself as *The Cyberpunk Anthology*, *Mirrorshades* was an opportunity for Sterling to seize some control over the cyberpunk narrative as it was quickly moving away from the margins and was slowly becoming an established form.

The *Mirrorshades* collective, however, isn't all about trading in leather jackets for cardigans in the name of respectability (or book sales); instead, Sterling insistently, perhaps desperately, links cyberpunk to the punk wave of the late-1970s: Cyberpunk's *bricoleurs* prized "their garage-band esthetic" by integrating the "overlapping of worlds that were formerly separate: the realm of high tech, and the modern pop underground" (x–xi). He also links cyberpunk to "Eighties pop culture: in rock video; in the hacker underground; in the jarring street tech of hip-hop and scratch music; in the synthesizer rock of London and Tokyo" (xi–xii). Drawing upon the 'future shock' espoused in futurist Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* (1970) and *The Third Wave* (1980), Sterling helps contextualize cyberpunk as "spontaneous, energetic, close to its roots. Cyberpunk comes from the realm where the computer hacker and the rocker overlap" (xiii). In perhaps the most concise summation (or marketing!) of cyberpunk, Sterling identifies two central themes running through cyberpunk that belie the critics' claims to narrative incoherence: "The theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry—techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of the self" (xiii).

These themes are notable when comparing the two stories that bookend *Mirrorshades*: William Gibson's "The Gernsback Continuum" and Bruce Sterling and Lewis Shiner's "Mozart in Mirrorshades." The former story establishes the defiant tone espoused by *Mirrorshades* and the Movement-turned-cyberpunk sensibility. The protagonist is an American photojournalist hired by publisher Dialta Downes to photograph the architectural detritus of a promised science fictional future that never came to pass, a "1980s that never happened. An architecture of broken dreams" (Gibson 5). As the narrator gets further into the project, however, he begins seeing visions of an America from an alternate timeline, which sends him to his friend Merv Kihn who explains the alternate timeline(s) as "semiotic phantoms, bits of deep cultural imagery that have split off and taken on a life of their own" (29–30). The story's restless attitude shines forth when one of the narrator's ghostly visions reveals a white, blond, and (likely) blue-eyed American family standing in front of a futuristic city that would have been all-too-familiar in the sf of earlier decades: "[T]hey were Heirs to the Dream [. . .]. Here, we'd gone on and on, in a dream logic that knew nothing of pollution, the finite bounds of fossil fuel, of foreign wars it was possible to lose" (9). In spite of the utopian promises of yesteryear's science fiction, this spectral future "had all the sinister fruitiness

of Hitler Youth propaganda” (9). In a manner reminiscent of the rebelliousness saturating the pages of *Cheap Truth* when sf’s elder statesmen were engaging in scoffing dismissiveness, Gibson masterfully rejects antiseptic visions of the science fictional futures inspired by the Pulp Age and Golden Age sf of the 1920s–1950s by calling forth comparisons to Hitler Youth propaganda. In so doing, and by virtue of being *Mirrorshades*’s lead-off story, “The Gernsback Continuum” sets the tone for the subsequent stories in the collection and in some ways rejects Sterling’s claims in the Preface that cyberpunk “is in some sense a return to roots” (x–xi). Punks didn’t always see eye to eye with one another, even if their rebel yells were often aimed in the same direction, and in one deft sentence, Gibson’s punkish sneer in “The Gernsback Continuum” undercuts those roots Sterling was trying to cultivate in his Preface.

“Mozart in Mirrorshades” also features alternate timelines, only unlike the subtlety of “The Gernsback Continuum” the punk iconography of “Mozart in Mirrorshades” is both gleefully apparent and ruthlessly harnessed to fuel the story’s condemnation of neoliberal capitalism. The protagonist, Rice, is overseeing the management of an 18th-century Salzburg by megacorporations that utilize temporal mechanics to exploit alternate pasts for corporate profit, chiefly by consuming such natural resources as oil or spiriting away not-yet-priceless artwork. As Veronica Hollinger writes for her contribution to this *Companion*, “Mozart in Mirrorshades” positions the past as nothing more than “standing-reserve in the inflexible logic of capitalist expansion, and the Great Acceleration of the American future overwhelms (a version of) 18th-century Austria” (328). Consequently, global history has been completely shattered thanks to these capital interventions from ‘Realtime,’ which causes growing resentment from those who are not reaping the benefits of corporate expansion; for example, Thomas Jefferson, who has replaced George Washington as America’s first president, is upset that “[y]ou guaranteed us liberty and equality and the freedom to pursue our own happiness. Instead we find machinery on all sides, your cheap manufactured goods seducing the people of our great country, our minerals and works of art disappearing into your fortresses, never to reappear!” (226–27). Rice cares little for Jefferson’s quibbles; instead, he appears fixated on meeting Marie Antoinette by way of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the famous composer who now sports a “bristling hedgehog cut that had replaced the boy’s outmoded wig [...] faded jeans, camo jacket, and mirrored sunglasses” (224, 228). After a weeklong sexual marathon with ‘Toinette,’ which includes such scintillating discussions as the merits of leather bikinis and *Vogue* magazine, Rice is betrayed by the object of his obsession and is captured by Masonistas, at least until he is rescued by a Harley-riding Jebe Noyon who has seemingly abandoned Genghis Khan to join the Trans-Temporal Army. Rice returns to Salzburg to find the megacorporations are pulling out of the alternate 18th century. Rice also learns Mozart orchestrated Rice’s capture by the Masonistas, but Mozart escapes any repercussions thanks to his *Billboard* success—he is #5 on the charts!—and a new record contract from Realtime that not only promises salvation from the 18th century but also rewards him with all the trappings of neoliberal capitalism: cars, women, and access to the finest recording studios. The final image of the story is Rice retreating down the tunnel toward Realtime carrying an unconscious Toinette over his shoulder. “Mozart in Mirrorshades” is therefore a prime example of cyberpunk prizing “the bizarre, the surreal, [and] the formerly unthinkable” (Sterling xiv–xv) while also exhibiting what becomes *de rigueur* in cyberpunk: late capitalist enterprises ruthlessly exploiting and mining (human and nonhuman) resources.

The most thematically similar stories in *Mirrorshades*—or, dare I say, the most quintessentially cyberpunk—are John Shirley’s “Freezone” (1985) and Pat Cadigan’s “Rock On” (1984), the former an excerpt from his novel *Eclipse* and the latter a thematic preview of Cadigan’s future novel, the Arthur C. Clarke Award-winning *Synners* (1991). Shirley’s story follows Rick Rickenharp and the downfall of his rock ’n roll band as it performs its last concert on Freezone, a floating aggregation of offshore drilling platforms in the Atlantic Ocean that “dealt in pleasant distractions for the rich in the exclusive section and—in the second-string places around the edge—for technickis from the

drill rigs. The second-string places also sheltered a few semi-illicit hangers-on and a few hundred performers. Like Rickenharp” (141–42). Although Rickenharp and his band perform the show of a lifetime, declining sales figures from their two previous recordings coupled with internal squabbles have doomed the band. The squabbles center on whether the band should go *minimono*, a musical style bucking the waning trend known as the *flare* whose adherents wear their “hair up, as far over the top of [the] head as possible and in some way that *expressed*, that emphasized the wearer’s individuality, originality. The more colors the better” (Shirley 144). Rickenharp expresses some respect for the *flare*, in part because he is more apt to bed flare women, but has no patience for *minimono* and the “stultifying regularity of their canned music” (Shirley 145). The monochromatically styled *minimono* fans are easily recognizable by their “flat-black, flat-gray, monochrome tunics and jumpsuits, the black wristfones, the cookie-cutter sameness” (Shirley 145), while their musicians are physically wired into the “impulse-translation pickups on the stage floor, making [them] look like a puppet with its strings inverted [...]. The long, funereal wails peeling from hidden speakers were triggered by the muscular contractions of his arms and legs and torso” (Shirley 145–46). *Flare* or *minimono* is a moot distinction: Neither style speaks to Rickenharp’s identification with punk music, and he breaks with his band after they finally decide to go *minimono* and yearn for a wire-dancer who can bring them mainstream *Billboard* glory. “Freezone” is therefore caught between conflicting sentiments: On the one hand, Rickenharp (and Shirley) is defiantly rebellious in his refusal to allow a punk sensibility to simply roll over and die in the face of changing musical tides; on the other hand, there is a palpable acceptance that for all his revolutionary swagger, Rickenharp and punk are *déclassé*, finding themselves again in the margins that are both exhilarating and exhausting for punk pioneers. After all, by the end of the story Rickenharp is unceremoniously left to drop blue mescaline and lose himself in Freezone with a new set of characters who are trying to escape Freezone without alerting The Second Alliance International Security Corporation. In the end, there is very little sense, at least in this excerpt from *Eclipse*, that a punk sensibility will actually get you anywhere beyond wandering a recommissioned oil rig in a drug-induced haze.²

Gina, the first-person narrator of Cadigan’s “Rock On,” is also seeking escape, and in a comparable manner to Rickenharp, she is also desperately seeking freedom from the *Billboard Top 40* corporate commodification of rock ’n roll. Gina is a human synthesizer, a *sinner*,³ locked into an exploitative contract with Man-O-War: As a *sinner*, she is the cybernetic talent behind Man-O-War’s public success. Thanks to implanted sockets that allow her to literally plug into the band, Gina can rock

Man-O-War through the wires, giving him the meat and bone that made him Man-O-War and the machines picking it up, sound and vision, so all the tube babies all around the world could play it on their screens whenever they wanted. Forget the road, forget the shows, too much trouble [...]. And the tapes weren’t as good as the stuff in the head, rock ’n roll visions straight from the brain [...]. In the end, they didn’t have to play instruments unless they really wanted to, and why bother? Let the synthesizer take their imaginings and boost them up to Mount Olympus. (39–40)

Recognized in a Greek greasy spoon as a runaway *sinner*, Gina is forced by the members of the talent-stifled band Misbegotten to work her *sinning* skills. Unfortunately, Gina’s latest side-project attracts Man-O-War’s attention and ruins Misbegotten’s chances at rock ’n roll glory: “Man-O-War had his conglomerate start to buy Misbegotten right after the first tape came out. Deal all done by the time we’d finished the third one, and they never knew” (41). Gina expresses her contempt for Man-O-War, who she accuses of killing rock ’n roll, all the while Man-O-War counters that Gina is trying to bury it alive, but the debate is futile: Gina is marched off to continue

serving out her contract as Man-O-War's *sinner*, and corporate rock 'n roll continues to dominate the marketplace.

As the only woman-authored story in the *Mirrorshades* collection, Cadigan's "Rock On" highlights one of cyberpunk's initial problems: its unmistakable lack of diversity. Samuel R. Delany has commented on the under-acknowledged influence of 1970s feminist sf upon cyberpunk, an influence "whose obliteration created such a furor when Bruce Sterling (inadvertently of course ...?) elided it from his introduction to [William Gibson's] *Burning Chrome* [collection]. Sometimes it seems as though these male writers were trying to sublimate the whole feminist movement unto themselves—which can only be done at the expense of history" (173). Similarly, Kelly remarks upon cyberpunk's "heteronormative conventions of gender, sexuality, and power [...] there was a huge disparity between the number of strong male characters and the number of strong female characters, and gay and lesbian characters were all but invisible" (151). A few years later, Nicola Nixon, in her article "Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?," convincingly argued "cyberpunk fiction is, in the end, not radical at all. Its slickness and apparent subversiveness conceal a complicity with '80s conservatism" (231). At the same time, cyberpunk's problematic, if not outwardly hostile, approach to race has largely been overlooked and is the subject of Isiah Lavender's "Critical Race Theory" chapter in this *Companion*. Focusing on Steven Barnes's *Streetlethal* (1983), *Gorgon Child* (1989), and *Firedance* (1993), Lavender writes that Barnes's use of black and brown skin color for his characters demystifies a literary mode resolutely designed by others to exclude black authors—a decision purposefully made by Bruce Sterling in his codifying of cyberpunk in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* (1986), as if mentioning 'the visionary shimmer of Samuel Delany' (x) and 'the jarring tech of hip hop' (xii) make it impervious to claims of racism" (313). Lavender sees in the emergence of Afrocyberpunk, however, "another way to describe black speculative cultural practices, only with particular attention to cyberspace, simulations, and/or virtual realities (technical or biological) as sites of revolution and social reform" that "offer us consciously racialized settings in their imaginings, resolutely challenging the whiteness of cyberpunk" (314; 315).

It is this widespread homogeneity that later writers reformed, if not outright rejected, including a late-1980s and early-1990s wave of writings from Cadigan, Laura Mixon, Mary Rosenblum, and others that was an expression of what Karen Cadora calls a 'feminist cyberpunk' that challenged cyberpunk's heteronormative assumptions and conventions. Or, as Lisa Yaszek writes in "Feminist Cyberpunk," such works as "[Gwyneth] Jones's *Escape Plans* (1986), [Candas Jane] Dorsey's "(Learning About) Machine Sex" (1988), and [Lisa] Mason's *Arachne* (1990) put women at the front and center of their cyberpunk worlds" (35).

By virtue of its self-promotion, *The Cyberpunk Anthology* may have also been contributing to the idea that cyberpunk had already died by a thousand paper cuts by the time of *Mirrorshades*'s own publication. Lewis Shiner's *New York Times* editorial "Confessions of an Ex-Cyberpunk" (1991) is the most damning coroner's report: Writers quickly began to turn "form into formula: implant wetware (biological computer chips), government by multinational corporations, street-wise, leather-jacketed, amphetamine-loving protagonists and decayed orbital colonies." According to Rucker, however, Shiner was already digging cyberpunk's grave as far back as 1985 when, after a fractious cyberpunk conference panel featuring Shiner, Sterling, Rucker, Cadigan, and Bear, Shiner reportedly asked "So I guess cyberpunk is dead now?" (209). Sterling certainly provided an added signatory to cyberpunk's death certificate when, in his essay "Cyberpunk in the Nineties" (1991), he acknowledged that the cyberpunk pioneers, most of whom were in their forties when Sterling wrote his essay but are now in their sixties and seventies, "are no longer a Bohemian underground. This too is an old story in Bohemia; it is the standard punishment for success. An underground in the light of day is a contradiction in terms. Respectability does not merely beckon; it actively envelops. And in this sense, 'cyberpunk' is even deader than Shiner admits." In this regard, *Mirrorshades* may actually be regarded as cyberpunk's funeral procession, perhaps

even its tombstone, for a Movement that had quickly gone mainstream, its upstart rebelliousness sacrificed upon the altar of conventional acceptance and commercialization. It is arguably for this reason that so many members of the *Mirrorshades* collective made concerted efforts to distance themselves from cyberpunk as the 1980s waned; however, cyberpunk's eulogies were premature. As Sherryl Vint and I wrote in "The Sea Change(s) of Cyberpunk," "we have never more been in need of a fiction capable of engaging with the world as shaped by information technology, which perhaps explains the sub-genre's persistent afterlife" (xii). That afterlife is evident in a 1990s that ushered forth new generations of authors who would push literary cyberpunk in new directions that has carried forth well into the 21st century; similarly, visual cyberpunk—films, television shows, comic books, and video games—continue to expose cyberpunk and its visual motifs to a vast audience.⁴

In the end, the *Mirrorshades* collective provided the genetic material for a range of literary and visual motifs that ensured cyberpunk "didn't so much die as experience a sea change into a more generalized cultural formation" (Foster xiv), a central premise informing not only *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture* but also my two previous collections, *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives* (co-edited with Sherryl Vint) and *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture* (co-edited with Lars Schmeink). In hindsight, we can look back and recognize that *Mirrorshades* and 1980s-era cyberpunk embody not so much a genre or sub-genre organized around distinct or formal components but, instead, a cultural formation which is "a historical articulation of textual practices with 'a variety of other cultural, social, economic, historical and political practices'" (Foster xvi). Alternately, cyberpunk can also be thought of as a parabola—i.e., "more concrete than themes, more complex than motifs, parabolas are combinations of meaningful setting, character, and action that lend themselves to endless redefinition and jazzlike improvisation" (Attebery and Hollinger vii)—that continues to offer seemingly endless redefinitions and improvisations, whether we use such labels as feminist cyberpunk, second- and third-wave cyberpunk, postcolonial cyberpunk, and/or post-cyberpunk. Sterling's Preface to *Mirrorshades* may have committed early cyberpunk to the axis of body invasion and mind invasion, but *The Cyberpunk Anthology* also exemplifies Sterling's point that, again, the cyberpunk "label is an uneasy bed of Procrustes" (ix), and as our techno-saturated world looks increasingly like the cyberpunk worlds of fiction, *Mirrorshades* continues to resonate, albeit imperfectly and not-unproblematically, with the cyberpunk futures that surround us.

Notes

- 1 This account was essentially confirmed to me by David Hartwell in a social conversation when he and I both sat on the Executive Board for the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts (2007–10).
- 2 For a damning, but no less accurate, reading of the sexist overtones in Shirley's "Freezone," see Petto for details.
- 3 Although Cadigan later modifies the spelling to "synner" in her novel *Synners*, the first appearance in "Rock On" is spelled "sinner."
- 4 For more details, please consult other entries in this collection and/or *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture* (2018), edited by Graham J. Murphy and Lars Schmeink.

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