

Aggressively technological: origins of cyberpunk and manifestation in literature, comics and cinema.

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ABSTRACT

In this article, cyberpunk has been portrayed as a crossover of environmental concerns that occurred in an era of science fiction known as new wave combined with a feeling of anxiety about the future of punk counterculture. In addition, the full relevance of this subgenre of science fiction is highlighted, since its projections anticipated many of the ethical dilemmas and theoretical concerns that exist today regarding issues such as the introduction of technology into our body, the growing gap between social classes or the dichotomy between urbanism and nature. Besides, other of the aims is to capture cyberpunk as a thematic and stylistic genre that has been expressed in almost all artistic areas, highlighting its representation in literature, comics and cinema.

Keywords: cyberpunk, science fiction, punk, literature, counterculture, urbanism, technology, critical thinking.

I walked through the city limits (someone talked me in to do it)
 Attracted by some force within it (had to close my eyes to get close to it)
 Around a corner where a prophet lay (saw the place where she'd a room to stay)
 A wire fence where the children played (saw the bed where the body lay)
 Joy Division, "Interzone"

INTRODUCTION

The presentation of any dystopian society located in the near future has a lot to do with punk, whose nihilism relies on the fact that the failures of our capitalist system were already irreparable causing unemployment, pollution and wars that far from easing would get worse and worse at the same pace as the technical progress of society. This would generate an apocalyptic anxiety usually linked to the morbid recreation of a future that was supposed to await humanity, instead of proposing solutions such as the social degrowth that hippies advocated for. A good example of this would be songs like "Un rayo de sol" from *La Polla Records*, whose title poses an ironic allusion to the homonymous theme of *Los Diablos*:

A ray of sunshine/ barely passes through the polluted air/ illuminating the blue sea full of
full and the green fields/ plastic waste baskets leftover/ the lush bare forests of acid rain/
the pale moon is occupied by Russians and Americans¹.

However, apart from this generality, this article aims to show many other more specific elements that cyberpunk owes to punk, in addition to the roots that both movements had in postmodern philosophy. Finally, I hope that this text will also serve to situate these two countercultural currents as epistemologies of full relevance for understanding the peculiarities of our society and addressing the challenges that are emerging with regard to the future.

When it comes to cyberpunk, as a subgenre of science fiction, it accounts for a curious process of osmosis. First of all, the original punks borrowed elements from science fiction, as well as from the rock n' roll of the fifties and pornography, to shape the grotesque collage of their outfits. This was fully shaped years later, when science fiction began to nourish itself with the themes and aesthetic features of punk, thus generating a cross-fertilization that gave rise to subgenres such as steampunk, cyberpunk or neuropunk (González, 2017). The latter, which is perhaps the least explored, is basically a literary expression in which the brain is placed as the absolute center of the tale, as a motif, character, or even a space (Burolo, 2022). Instead, I think that the most suitable example for my analysis is cyberpunk, considering that some authors, like Fredric Jameson, have paid special attention to it in order to penetrate the postmodern idiosyncrasy, under the proposal that its groundings, like those of punk, represent a hyperbole of the time that "is returning more reliable information about the contemporary world than an exhausted realism can do" (Mazo, 2009, p. 31).

Authors such as Manuel Castells, Zygmunt Bauman, Jürgen Habermas and Jameson himself pointed out in their works the technological and the informational as the roots of contemporary society, elements that will stand as protagonists of these and other artistic manifestations. Jean Baudrillard also divided his concept of the simulacra into three chained stages: first, the utopian, which was typical of modernity, lavish in stories about distant worlds and alternative societies; second, the science fiction of the early twentieth century, whose experience with the technological advances derived from the Industrial Revolution made those distant worlds gradually approach ours; and finally, the hyperreal that begins in the middle of the last century and constitutes a diffuse mixture of these imaginary worlds with the material reality. At this time, even journalistic media reports imply an approach to science fiction. An example of this would be the reports regarding environmental catastrophe, globalization and other similar issues that this thinker writer would use to assert that science fiction has become an interpretive principle of reality (Francescutti, 2011). That is why some science fiction and cyberpunk authors, such as Bruce Sterling and William Gibson, whom I will address next, and filmmakers like the Wachowski sisters,

¹Both this and the other quotes whose original language was Spanish are my translations. I want to thank Guillermo Chacón Poveda and Marina Casado Guerrero for their great help with the translation corrections.

creators of *Matrix* (1999) were inspired by Baudrillard's theories and made direct references to them in their works.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Speculative fiction has always had an intention of critical analysis of the present, as evidenced by the following statement by Ursula K. Le Guin: "the Future, in fiction, is usually nothing more than a way of looking at the Present" (García-Teresa, 2009, p. 11). Instead, unlike her utopian novels of anarcho-Taoist ideology, closer to pacifism and conservative eroticism of the hippie movement, punk gave cyberpunk its anxious and pessimistic vision of the future. That is, its dystopism. For Núñez Ladeveze, dystopia is nothing more than the opposite of utopia, its implementation, and argues that utopia, "by becoming facts, by trying to circumvent the long adventure that separates beautiful words from human acts, generates dystopia" (Franco, 2021, p. 126).

Cyberpunk dystopia differs from the classical one posed by authors such as George Orwell in that much of the latter's production took as a target of its criticism the totalitarian regimes that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, while the first was born in a world in which the Nazi-Soviet threat was annihilated and the focus of tension was concentrated in the neoliberal system itself.

The rabid explosion of punk generated the perfect breeding ground for an agonist science fiction to nourish its aesthetic and ideological peculiarities in order to give rise to a very prolific subgenre that has remained without continuity since the 1980s, as it can be seen in the appearance in 2020 of the video game *Cyberpunk 2077*. In fact, some theorists have compared the operation by which cyberpunk broke away from the mainstream science fiction environment with punk's reaction to "symphonic elegances of seventies progressive rock" (Sterling at McKay, 1999, p. 54). An aesthetic influence that is specified, for example, in the constant references to this musical genre in some of its works with a purely environmental function, as in *Software* (1982), by Rudy Rucker. Among its precursors in science fiction, it is worth mentioning those members of the new wave, such as Le Guin, J. G. Ballard, Philip K. Dick, Michael Moorcock and Norman Spinrad. Although it shared with these authors its countercultural and often nihilistic character, the new wave was a movement characterized by technophobia, recommending in its writings a certain caution with regards to technology and the dangers arising from an irresponsible use, in which case we could link their ideology to the environmentalism of the hippies and the agenda currently led by the conservative vision of the series *Black Mirror* (Wenk, 2023).

However, there are other influences that do not strictly belong to science fiction, despite their proximity, such as the paranoid environments of authors like William S. Burroughs and Thomas Pynchon, of whom they picked up the distressing feeling of living in a world full of conspiracies, in which everything is under the control of a secret oligarchy which is a symbol of the impersonal power exercised by transnational corporations in global capitalism; and the world of delinquency

embodied in crime novels, which inspired characters alike in harshness to the detectives of Dashiell Hammett (Mazo, 2009, p. 32).

The previously mentioned author, Gibson, one of the first examples of cyberpunk, considered that "what Burroughs was doing with plot and language and the science fiction motifs I saw in other writers was literally mind expanding" (Yu, 2012, p. 95). Perhaps this is because Burroughs' production was characterized by his call for the "revolution of language, the revolution of culture. Revolution everywhere" (Rocha, 2014, p. 226). If Jameson interpreted the horror caused by the capitalism of the corporations and the paranoia of the high technology as the postmodern version of the sublime of Edmund Burke (McKay, 1999, p. 62), Inmaculada Murcia extended this idea to the gigantic urban spaces, cyborg transhumanism and the dystopian environments of cyberpunk, as they all reflect

the different perspectives of the technological fascination under a theme that, just as it comes off as familiar to the receiver, transports them to a non place, to a simulation where everything can be possible and unlimited [...]. The receiver will be overwhelmed by what Burke will call "vastness". This vastness that overwhelms the senses (Prieto, 2018, p. 99).

Some punk and post-punk groups reflected this perspective in their lyrics, such as Cabaret Voltaire, whose diffuse political consciousness was labelled by Simon Reynolds as "anarcho-paranoid" (2006, p. 171). One of its members, Stephen Mallinder, reflected in his music the awareness of this species of all-round control whose tentacles were infiltrated mainly through thinking. Such a conception was enhanced –as in the case of Burroughs– by drug abuse, an "economy of excess" (Bataille, 1933) that led them to be attracted by all of the available conspiracy theories: "Being in a state of paranoia is a very healthy state to be in [...]. It gives you a permanently questioning and searching non-acceptance of situations" (Mallinder, in Reynolds, 2006, p. 171).

On the other hand, Ballard's science fiction anticipated the high pornographic content of cyberpunk, an aesthetic of sexploitation present in stories such as "Plan for the Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy" and "Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan" that were included in a posterior anthology entitled *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970), to which Joy Division alluded a decade later on a track with the same name. Such tales fused obsessive and grotesque lust with ideas close to Marshall McLuhan's analysis of the information society, to unravel until what extent media shapes individual desires. Similarly, cyberpunk inherited both from science fiction and punk the exploration of unusual and norm-deviant bodies and minds, perhaps because the estrangement of their worlds has allowed disability and disease to be perceived from more inclusive perspectives. This characteristic takes place because "the science fiction genre has the distinct potential to challenge our assumptions about what is normal and desirable about physical embodiment and mental capacities through the questioning of the "ascribed and not essential" nature of human existence and embodiment" (Gibson, 2020, p. 14).

CYBERPUNK THROUGH LITERATURE, COMIC AND CINEMA

The first rigorously cyberpunk piece of work is John Shirley's 1980 novel *City Come A-Walkin'*, a cultural classic that places more emphasis on punk elements than in those of cyberspace, since its protagonists are a scattered gang of low-life urban figures, who mainly belong to homosexual and sadomasochistic environments. Meanwhile, the emergence of technology is limited to the idea of machines that connect the global village through letters sent electronically, which anticipated the invention of the internet. However, the subgenre became popular after the success of the film *Blade Runner*, by Ridley Scott, in 1982 (Gomel, 2018). And yet, the coining of the label cyberpunk had to wait until the following year, when Bruce Bethke (1983) titled as such a story that he published in the magazine *Amazing Science Fiction Stories*, after which he began to name under this label the work of writers like Gibson, Sterling and Lewis Shiner. This aesthetic trend has been manifested in all of the art forms, but specially in literature, movies and comics. In fact, when it comes to comics, we can observe some dystopian megalopolises such as those proposed by Jean Giraud, "Moebius", co-creator of the French magazine *Métal Hurlant*, published between 1974 and 1987, which is another one of the influences of the genre (Franco, 2021). In the illustrations of this author we can already find flying cars that cross a sky congested by traffic, relentless advertising bombings and the extreme polarization of society, divided into an elite that inhabits fantastic buildings and a dramatically precarious periphery.

And so, cyberpunk radicalizes an urban phenomenon that began in Greco-Roman cities, where the seed of ecophobia was already found in the fact of having erected walls to keep nature apart and to enforce a

'new type of space'. The ancient city, says Spengler: 'contradicts nature in the lines of its silhouette. It denies all nature', while 'the gigantic megalopolises, the world cities [...], tolerate nothing around them and enforce themselves by annihilating the country landscape' (Brown, 1980, p. 328).

Some iconic works that were also based on the futuristic, militarized and hyper-guarded urban environments are *Metropolis* by Fritz Lang, in 1927 (Lus, 2020) –a pioneer piece in its exhibition of a world divided between the surface and the underground–, *Blade Runner*, *Ghost in the Shell* (Byeongjin, 2022) by Mamoru Oshii, in 1995, and *Matrix*. Likewise, the development of innovative urban spaces within science fiction experienced great effervescence between 1981 and 1984, with creations such as *Les Aventures by John Difoole* (1980-1988), also known as *The Incal*, scripted by Alejandro Jodorowsky and illustrated by Moebius himself; and the manga *Akira* (1982-1990), by Katsuhiro Ôtomo, whose landscapes were inspired by *Metropolis*.

A paradigmatic example of this sublime bastion is found in the aforementioned seminal novel by Gibson, *Neuromancer*, which has been adapted to film and comic and it is the one that established

the theme and aesthetic standards of cyberpunk, just like Sterling would rise as the main ideologue of the movement through the collection of stories entitled *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* (1986). One of Gibson's greatest influences was Shirley, of whose novels he said:

I can hear the guitars, like there's some monstrous subliminal wall-o'-sound chewing at the edges of the text", but also London's punk environment itself: "when I was fifteen, that was my wildest dream [...]. There was a while, at the start of all this cyberpunk stuff, when I contemplated dressing up like that, getting a foot tall blue mohawk or something [...]. I hung out with some punks in London." (Yu, 2012, p. 91-95).

In *Neuromancer* we can trace the birth of the concept of cyberspace, in addition to a latent fading of the boundaries between what it is digital and what it is organic and the updating of the megalopolis found in classical dystopia:

Cyberspace. An agreed upon hallucination that billions of legal operators from all countries experience every day, children taught mathematical concepts... A graphic and abstract representation of the data of all the computers of humanity. A thing of ungraspable complexity. Lines of light aligned in the non-place of the mind, groups and constellations of data, similar to the lights of a city, moving away... (Gibson, 2021, p. 69)

It is set in what would become the quintessential chronotope of cyberpunk, that is, in a future that is presented as possible and forthcoming and in a city flooded by technological devices and other refined forms of social domination. Its power core is located in humongous corporation buildings, whose artificial intelligences try to monopolize information and management of finance in a virtual space in which cybercriminals try to penetrate, embodied in the figure of the hacker. Such vision is developed in Jean-François Lyotard's piece *La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (1979), in which society is no longer perceived as physical fabric, but like a "self-regulated system. That is, the theoretical –and even material– model is no longer perceived as a living organism, but a cybernetic one that turns the traditional, modern and analogous vision into a digital one" (Prieto, 2018, p. 92).

Two basic pillars of the nature of these cities converge with two core concepts of Michel Foucault's philosophy: the concept of *heterotopia* and that of *panopticon*. The first one is dictated by the work of Burroughs and the tales of Jorge Luis Borges, in which the disturbing juxtaposition is manifested, "in a single real place, [of] several spaces, several locations that are by themselves incompatible with each other" (Foucault in Ocaranza and Díaz, 2015, p. 51). The cyberpunk city is heterotopic because, within it, overlapping fragments of radically different nature coexist. *Neuromancer*, in particular, is described as a city halfway between Babylon and Las Vegas, plagued by prostitutes, criminals and drug addicts, under which we can find a hypertechnological fortification in which a privileged minority resides. Regarding the outside, the natural surroundings are highly polluted due to an ecological disaster that filled the sky with radioactivity and the sea

with toxic waste. The latter is also a recurring reason, given that, when cyberpunk productions show what is on the margins of megacities, the cliché of still and barren nature usually appears, as in *Blade Runner 2049* by Denis Villeneuve, where what exists behind the vast walls of Mega-City One is a wasteland known as the Cursed Earth (Elyamany, 2023).

In second place, Foucault's study on the relationship between space, architecture and power gave rise to the term "panopticon", with which he pointed towards the updated forms of control of postmodernity, which abandon the older versions of physical coercion in favour of methods of internal discipline through surveillance, "with the intention of turning human beings into tame and useful bodies" (Ocaranza and Díaz, 2015, p. 51). Two other meeting points of *Neuromancer* and punk are the celebration of the death of the community and its traditions. Its characters are fighting for their individual survival –despite being forced to build temporary alliances–, and its taste for Jamaican music, manifested for example in Maelcum, a Rastafarian pilot.

In addition, as it was previously mentioned, Sterling provided a solid ideology for this tendency since it was him who set the slogan *high tech, low life*, on the intuition that technology is developed exponentially without a necessary pairing in ethical and political matters. In this regard, cyberpunk did not raise the technophobic concerns of the new wave, but its iconoclasm did not make it particularly enthusiastic of progress either, in the way of artists of the golden age of science fiction. Instead, it did transfer the goods of science to the individual realm, exploring the advantages that radical subjectivities could obtain from it in their struggle against the system. The fusion of technology and counterculture –from the cyberpunk letterhead itself– denotes "'anarchy via machines' or 'machine rebel movement'" (Yu, 2012, p. 89), which led Sterling to define the subgenre as "a profane alliance between the technological world and that of organized dissidence, the underground world of pop culture, visionary fluidity and the anarchy of the streets" (Mazo, 2009, p. 31). This contemporary sensibility was so present in its precepts, that in 1997 a manifesto cyberpunk was written by Christian Kirtchev, in which it was argued that "the Network is our essence. In the Network we are the kings [...]. We build our worlds in cyberspace. Lots of zeros and ones, lots of bits of information. We build our community. The cyberpunk community" (Prieto, 2018, p. 92). Hence, we can say that, just as the punks did not idealize the country life, in the manner of the hippies, but rather occupied the cores of all cities and formed an updated bohemia with an aggressively urban character, the characters that populate the cyberpunk world –outcasts, hackers, lone freaks, and counter-cultures– are aggressively technological. However, such an idea could be a sample of the imprint that Burroughs left in science fiction, because this author always defended that technology offers the user new possibilities to fight a power that, according to him, resided above all in our way of categorizing and organizing the world through language. On the other hand, another individualistic attitude that some writers may have inherited from punk was its rejection of such a label, as Greg Bear, who claimed that the term was an abomination and that he did not feel recognized in such a movement: "The cyberpunks are revolutionary only in name. All they really care about is selling as many of their books as they can" (Yu, 2012, p. 97).

In the 1980s, technology was no longer something external, it was no longer "those gigantic wonders that spewed steam, such as the Hoover Dam, the Empire State Building, or nuclear power plants. The technology of the eighties sticks to the skin, responds to touch" (Sterling in Mazo, 2009, p. 33). Regarding this, Paul B. Preciado warned that, while in previous societies power relations were mediated by architecture and other elements external to the body, these days, the private space constituted by the body is colonized by chemical and micro-computerized components, such as hormones and "its systemic action on hunger, sleep, sex-drive, aggressiveness or social decoding of our femininity and masculinity" (2008, p. 66). Therefore, in the manner of the "techno-organes" of which the author himself spoke regarding mobile phones (2019, p. 59), scientific inventions in cyberpunk are part of the subjectivity and are indiscernible of the viscosity that punk favoured.

For its part, *Transmetropolitan* is a series written by Warren Ellis (1999, 2000, 2001), illustrated by Darick Robertson and published by Vertigo, a subset of DC Comics. This comic has –in my opinion– an integral reflection of punk, since the visual and verbal style forms an organic unit that integrates all its aesthetic principles. It is bestowed with a defiant spirit that pushed the limits of the thriving freedom of expression that began to open within the industry of its time, unlike the puritanism that characterized it in previous decades. And, perhaps because of the relevance of its themes and the way in which it presents the current society through the future in a satirical and hyperbolic way, *Transmetropolitan* obtained a surprising popularity, in addition to considerable attention from academic critics and a nomination to the Eisner Prize. Throughout its sixty issues, it follows the adventures of Spider Jerusalem, a journalist that has a disturbing effect on all corrupt agencies, who always ends up uncovering the political intrigues that exist behind each social conflict. He is presented as a character obsessed with telling the truth about topics such as the Church or the media, uncovering the immorality that lies beneath false appearances, which is why he is both hated and admired by all, since he is not aligned to any of the available political factions. His journalistic work is that of an individualistic activism based on the statement that "every law that limits my basic human freedoms, every lie they tell me [...], that's what makes me go after those bastards, and I will do so until I die or my brain dries up or something like that" (2001, p. 15).

The collection is set in a dystopian city of the 23rd century, featuring a hyper developed technology that has allowed the expansion of certain transhumanistic fantasies. This unnamed city is opposed to Paris, which is ravaged by a great decadence that can be seen in the fact that France has agreed to ban its official language as long as the international penalties imposed against its trade are lifted. The classical connotations of Paris are reflected in drawings that are essentially opposed to the chaotic and semiotically incoherent condition of the main city, which is represented with American features. From this we infer that American values have defeated traditional European hegemony and its modern episteme, anchored in the rationalism of the Enlightenment. In this sense, the transmetropolitan city, product of the Anglo-Saxon brand of the industrial revolution, has replaced the most recognisable entity of the European Enlightenment, just like the

capitalistic priorities of exploitation and profit have replaced the French revolutionary values of solidarity and commonwealth.

This city is a carnivalesque space in which human inhibition has been totally dissolved. It is represented as a sanctuary of vice in which all possible desires and perversions of the individual can take place, from cannibalism to child prostitution, including bodily modifications and human cloning, as shown in **Figure 1**. For example, in the first volume of "Kill Me Kissing", Spider invites all the women he talks to to dinner and the first one tells him that she no longer needs to eat because she had her stomach replaced for a colony of bacteria; another one of them, who is a breatharian, has recently asexualize herself, etc. But, on the other side, the protagonist visits the *reserves* for one of his investigations. Protected, idyllic spaces inhabited by communities with a way of life linked to nature, embedded in the carcinogenic environment of the city and, at the same time, foreign to it. The moment a person decides to settle in the reserves they lose every possibility of going back, because they are programmed to forget all their memories of modern life and to lose their immunity to diseases. This can be interpreted as a parody of the communal projects implemented by the hippie movement, since many of the children who were born and grew up in these areas later suffered great difficulties in adapting to State structures, such as school or work. Likewise, reservations have also been interpreted as repositories of the past that reflect postmodern concern for history and its need to understand remote times without exerting any kind of epistemic violence on them (Ferrerias, 2012).

Figure 1

Aesthetics of the cyberpunk city



From *Transmetropolitan #5* (Ellis, 1999).

However, this world in which science holds virtually unlimited power, which reaches the ability to manufacture artificial limbs and organs capable of curing any disease there is, is governed by a neoliberal economy that prevents such advances from being available to all citizens. Therefore, the illusion of progress and fulfilment promoted in the media contrasts radically with the precarious masses, child prostitution and the most hardcore drug addicts who populate its streets, being all of them exiled to the edges of society by the tools of power. Its two opposition political rulers are The Beast and The Smiley, two equally corrupt and morally dubious leaders who are vague reminiscences of Richard Nixon and Tony Blair, respectively (Ferreras, 2012). And, on the threshold between this possibility of heaven and the hellish reality that is exposed as the plot progresses, we find Spider, an extremely cynical, subversive and misanthropic being whose work is highly driven by drugs –especially, amphetamines– that reinforce his already remarkable critical and analytical capacity.

I previously pointed out that drugs have been a recurring ingredient since the dawn of science fiction. At first, they represented a tool of social control that came to replace or complement violence as a public method of adoption. Thus, throughout the evolution of the genre, they have been part of totalitarian regimes that force-fed them to the population, or as part of more liberal economic organizations, for which they constituted yet another alienating commodity deeper inside consuming and numbing customs, such as the *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley, 1932) "soma" and the antidepressants of *Fahrenheit 451* (Ray Bradbury, 1953). In cyberpunk, on the other hand, drugs are a product that's fully integrated into social practice and, despite the prohibitions, you can perceive an almost necessary consumption to tune in with the sensory overstimulation of the environment. Moreover, not only do they represent a logical manifestation of late capitalism, since, as Burroughs predicted, drugs are the definitive merchandise, because the trafficker does not sell his product to the consumer, he sells the consumer to the product (2004). Their normalization also provides them, in the words of Sterling, with the consideration of "a technology like any other" (Mazo, 2009, p. 34). According to Preciado's conception of the pharmaco-pornographic era, science is the religion of postmodernity, since it does not limit itself to describing realities, but also creates them, therefore causing many of our organic, psychic and sexual processes to be mediatized by chemicals, thus transforming "our depression in Prozac, our masculinity in testosterone" (2008, p. 32). Thus, neoliberal morality has shed the last debris of Christian morality, which conceived the body as a sacred sanctuary, to replace it with a radical Cartesian vision that considers its components –for example, hormones– to be an open source computer program prone to be hacked.

Back to the protagonist, this character is clearly inspired by Hunter S. Thompson, one of the most outstanding pioneers of the new journalism or gonzo journalism, whose writings denoted a notable concern for the process of achieving the story. This process often became an end in itself, a peculiarity that earned him yet another letterhead to describe his proposals: metajournalism (Nelson, 2014). The first issue of the saga, "Back on the Street", begins with the moment in which Spider must return to the city to fulfil an editorial contract after having spent five years sheltering

in a mountain hut, protected by anti-personnel mines and other smart weapons. Despite his aversion to society, the city's ontological character turns his self-exile into a damnation of nonexistence, which is evidenced by the fact that Spider is not able to write if he is not bodily present in the metropolis. These first pages divert from the futuristic aesthetic of the rest of the saga, and they can be interpreted as an allusion to the ranch in which Thompson himself was cloistered. Other features that link him to this American character are, among others, the fact of having to return to the city due to being bonded to a contract, the language he uses, his own physical appearance and the 60s design of the car in which he returns.

In contrast to previous superheroes, such as Batman or Superman, who are closer to a form of traditional epic adventure than to science fiction, with its corresponding reproduction of conventional morality and its low level of irony, *Transmetropolitan* introduces ethical and social dilemmas from the very beginning. Likewise, despite his integrity, Spider does not always manage to remain oblivious to the influences of his environment: for example, in the third volume of "Back on the Street", he decides to stay watching television for a whole day and, throughout the chapter, we see him buying what a teleshopping channel offers and calling an interactive program. During the call, instead, he begins to insult the rest of the guests, disrupting the dynamic of the show to such a level that it ends on the news. Such opposition to the spectacle through its own media is analogue to the scandal that the Sex Pistols lived in British television or the Vulpes in the Spanish one, a simulated revolt that he himself perceives with horror when he realizes the following revelation: "My God. I have become television" (Ellis, 1999c, p. 17). Likewise, the following speech, delivered by his editor, reports Spider's self-destructive traits and his voluntary pursuit of public hatred:

I found him in the bathroom, covered in regeneration tape to reflate and restore his veins, doing heroin between his toes. His eyes were bleeding, because he had rubbed them with cocaine to stay awake [...]. His last book had just come out, he wrote immensely popular columns, he was adored because he tortured the president every week [...]. And suddenly, it was all over. He was loved, he was rich, and he couldn't write anything. Not like he used to. Spider Jerusalem has to be in the city to be able to write, Yelena... But he needs to be **hated** (Ellis, 2000, p. 8).

After an angry and very visual enumeration of the drawbacks of his return to such an insane and overwhelming civilization, he decides to interview the chief of the *transients*, a feature which is defined as "the right to change species. When you change species, you change your perspective" (Ellis, 1999a, p. 23). This collective has entrenched in one of the most impoverished areas of the city in order to have their own territory and to live according to their new needs. The appearance of this group can be read as a parody of the increasingly ramified social communities of postmodern society, that have fragmented the traditional Manichean class struggle into a myriad of identities seeking legitimization within official narratives. However, when Spider arrives at the bar where the leader of the movement takes shelter, he notices that he is a charlatan and an

opportunistic guru who is getting a lot of poor women in the neighborhood pregnant and vulnerable, in addition to taking advantage of the speech of a crusade under which he has grouped the most desperate people in the area, who he consciously pushes into suicide: "However great the idea under which they rise, people are small, weak and scared. People kill all revolutions" (Ellis, 1999a, p. 39). This is a sample of the line that is constant throughout all the stories of the saga, in which underlies an anarchism similar to that deployed by the character of *V for Vendetta*, by Alan Moore (Zarić, 2020). Thus, the protagonist is caught between an iconoclasm that rejects any utopian revolutionary project and an unbearable awareness of the corruption of the political system, so that only the path of the solitary sabotage of the power structures remains. Such pessimism about society is also found in a turbulent conversation with the nation's president:

Spider: I walked out of here because you turned this and the whole country into a reflection of yourself.

President: Bullshit. You're afraid of the real America. All you liberal pissers are the same.

S: There is no "true" America! Nor the true city! There is what we want there to be! There is what we want there to exist! And you want everything to be a festering wound that exudes money! [...].

Q: The whole city voted for me. You know why? Because they only want decent television, four coins to buy alcohol, and a Saturday night blowjob (Ellis, 1999b, p. 41).

However, despite his disruptive and savage behavior, his aggressiveness is not usually materialized in physical attacks -a trait that links him to the performative violence of punk. Instead, all his struggles are developed in the field of information. Except on rare occasions that end up with him acting abruptly, one of his hallmarks is his refusal to carry weapons, while the law enforcement agencies -police officers, soldiers and bodyguards- appear characterized by an impulsive aggressiveness. Here, it is remarkable the distance previously discussed between science fiction, both technophilic or technophobic, and cyberpunk: in *Transmetropolitan*, despite all the destructive implications that technology may have in the hands of the powerful and the alienated mass, a liminal space in which these advances can be used in an ethical way that results in benefits for the community is also conceived. Thus, for example, science is the mean that allows Spider to defeat The Smiley and reveal his secrets; and before this, it is also thanks to the revolutionary advances in communication that the protagonist is able to prevent the massacre of the transients to reach its final consequences.

Finally, a brief mention should be made regarding the *rara avis* in the movie genre that is *Tamala 2010: A Punk Cat in Space* (Raine, 2011), an animated film made almost entirely by the multifaceted artist Kentaro Nemoto, a dark personality hidden under the pseudonym T.o.L. (Trees of Life) who wrote, directed and composed the music for this film. Its plot is based on a complicated conspiracy -probably inspired by Pynchon novels such as *The Crying of Lot 49* (Pynchon, 1966; Yi-Chuang, 2022)- located in a feline galaxy whose main cities, Tokyo and Hate

City, meet all the requirements of cyberpunk, as the advertising and pornography present both in the televisions of the houses and in the enormous screens that cover the facades of the buildings. In it, a company called Catty&Co., controls almost all the goods on the planet and, according to Professor Nominos, the tale of this industry dates back to ancient Egypt, linked to an ancient religion that worshipped the goddess Minerva and was led by a robotic and virtual cat that only exists in dreams, and spreads through cyberspace and perpetuates an infinite cycle of destruction and rebirth present in the slogan Catty&Co.: "destroy things, buy, destroy things, buy". The drawing style of the film reproduces the subversion of the elements of popular culture present in punk, as it combines the *kawaii* aesthetic, visible for example in the sweetened panda bears that drive taxis, the walls patterned with hearts or the protagonist of the story, a one-year-old cat in search of her mother; with other sordid and street components, such as prostitute cats, the cats wearing piercings and mohawks, or the word "hate" that is featured in all the products of Hate City -Hate Taxi, Hate Street, Hate FM, etc.-, as can be seen in **Figure 2**. In addition, there is a marked inclusion of visual psychedelia similar to other works of space science fiction, such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), accompanied by a soundtrack that intermixes techno, rock and lo-fi beats to give the film the dreamlike imprint that characterizes it.

Figure 2

Hate Tattoo



From *The Crying of Lot 49* (Pynchon, 1966).

CONCLUSIONS

Punk, despite all the symbolism and libertarian ideas that it portrays, through patches, the circled A, or its rage against the system, could not be categorized as a continuation of classical proletarian anarchism nor authors such as Piotr Kropotkin or Mikhail Bakunin. Thus, all its anxiety regarding the future of the planet did not feature collective solutions, but rather, most of them became self-perpetuating, forming a sort of decadent elite, and took up the dangerous axiom that their failure was an irrefutable demonstration of their awareness. In fact, it became necessary to coin the term *anarchopunk* for those exceptional cases of politicized and committed groups –like

the Crass or the Rondos– that proliferated in the early eighties, after the decline of the initial hatching, which tells us that this kind of attitude was not the most common at the time.

Likewise, we can also perceive this continuous peeking into the abyss and this systematic exploration of fatality in cyberpunk, a subgenre of science fiction that, as we have seen, constituted a portentous hybrid between counter-cultural science fiction of the late sixties and early punk. It took from its earliest ancestors the concern for the drift of the capitalistic, industrial and technological world. However, instead of alerting humanity about the dangers posed by hypertecnologization of life and unbridled exploitation of the environment, it replaced the utopian naivety of the hippie environment with the twisted and malicious vision of punk, aiming to stay one step ahead of the factual powers and to reach unimaginable levels of perversion. Thus, cyberpunk can be read as a tragic celebration of the self-destructive impulse of humanity, a parodic hyperbole of the intuitions that several of the most powerful philosophers in the twentieth century embodied in their writings.

To end with, I wanted to suggest that such conceptions about the impossibility of a reversal in the process unleashed by the neoliberal economy link these rebellious movements –punk and its heirs– with avant-garde philosophies such as accelerationism, that threw away all hippie nostalgia for a pre-capitalistic world. Instead, I think that we still need to thoroughly investigate the remnant of punk that carries some cultural and, specifically, musical movements, that have sprouted in later decades, like *drum and bass*, an electronic genre that was born in the underground environments of the black counterculture and that has led to styles such as *neurofunk* (Chapman, 2003). So, within the broad musical spectrum that we have inherited, the latter may be the sound in which most clearly reverberate the paranoia and paralyzing asphyxia, caused by the overexcitement of the present and the uncertainty of the future, which emerged as the main narrative subjects of cyberpunk.

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