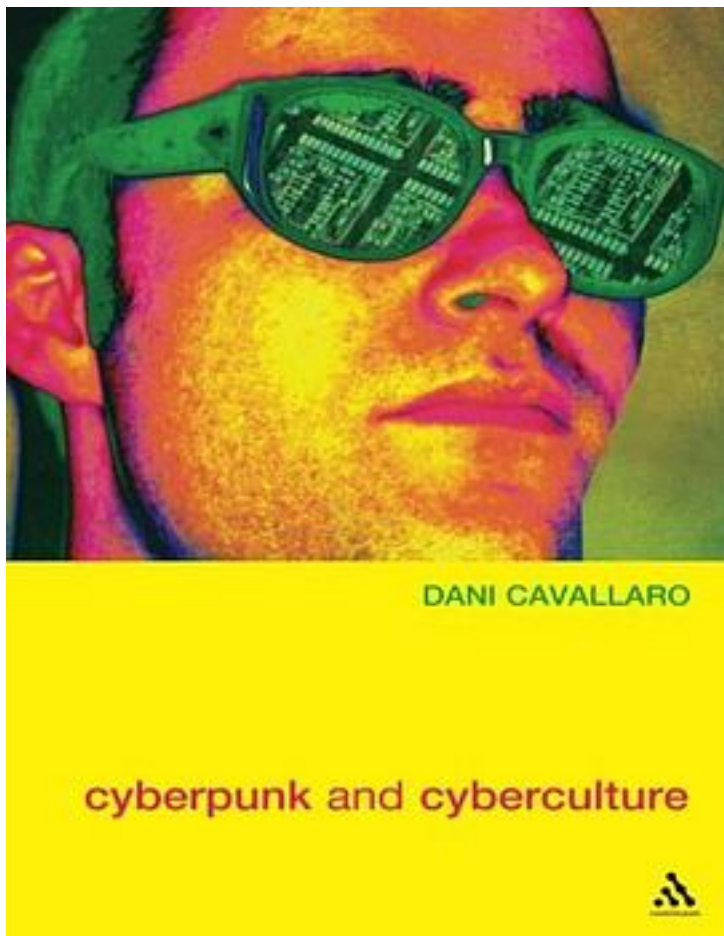


Cyberpunk and Cyberculture



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著者:Dani Cavallaro

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WRITING ABOUT CYBERPUNK FICTION involves a fairly unique combination of challenges and opportunities. Because rapid developments in digital culture are often informed by the language, ideas and atmospheres we find in cyberpunk fiction, writing

about such fiction can enable one to consider the dynamics between literary texts and the societal impact of technology in direct ways. However, this tight relationship can also make it difficult to obtain a broad perspective and critical purchase on cyberpunk fiction. Critical writing on cyberpunk sometimes resorts to reductive statements on literature and culture that are repetitive and seem to state merely the obvious. Dani Cavallaro's book on cyberpunk and cyberculture takes advantage of the opportunities and overcomes the challenges of its subject matter. It is a broad, comprehensive and thorough book that uses Gibson's fiction to assess some of the points of convergence between cyberpunk fiction and cultural technologies. Cavallaro's book serves at least two functions. Firstly, it is a reliable textbook on many familiar themes of cyberpunk criticism, such as the genre's relation to other literary forms and its treatment of the body, gender and sexuality. Secondly, it addresses many original and suggestive aspects of and connections between cyberpunk and cyberculture.

Cavallaro writes in detail about Gibson's texts and at times discusses issues arising from extant cyberpunk criticism. However, Cavallaro is less concerned with situating Cyberpunk and Cyberculture in existing critical debates than with generating new contextualizations for cyberpunk fiction. Consequently, Cavallaro's analyses of familiar topics are sometimes characterized by a combination of the customary and the remarkable. For example, Cavallaro's statement that cyberpunk represents an overturning of the Enlightenment demonization of the body is almost a cliché of postmodern thinking. Yet references to the medieval and Gothic elements of Raymond Chandler's detective fiction in a discussion of cyberpunk and literary traditions exemplify how Cavallaro frequently creates new perspectives on canonical elements of cyberpunk fiction. Similarly, when discussing the significance of the term "cyberpunk," Cavallaro takes the cultural phenomenon of British punk rock seriously and as a result is able to show how the bricolage of Gibson's fiction is related to the punk anti-aesthetic of found objects. Also, Cavallaro's etymological approach serves to highlight the ambiguities and interconnectedness of cyberculture. For ambiguity, see the discussion of virtual technology in terms of the etymology of the Latin *virtus*, which, for Cavallaro, means both moral excellence and Machiavellian opportunism; for interconnectedness, Cavallaro contrasts the meaning of the Greek *techne* as art and *poesis* as making with the transposed meanings of the English "technology" and "poetry." Whereas references to the etymology of cybernetics that are evident in many studies of the new technologies often serve only a local function, Cavallaro's etymological analyses resonate with the entirety of Cyberpunk and Cyberculture in that they underscore the idea of a substantial affiliation between language and technology.

Cavallaro's comments on how fictional elements are apparent in many manifestations of cyberculture recur throughout the book. Since the idea of the constructedness or fictionality of social meaning is a primary feature of postmodern thinking, it is not surprising that Cavallaro often incorporates a defense of broad intellectual positions associated with postmodernism into analyses of fictionality. In a discussion of the presence of mythological themes in both literature and technology, Cavallaro takes issue with Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont's *Intellectual Impostures*. Cavallaro's critique of this book is effective because it uses examples of how technological initiatives are based upon fictional concepts, such as John Walker's software company, Autodesk, to debunk the notion of an iron curtain separating scientific and cultural meaning upon which *Intellectual Impostures* is based. Cavallaro occasionally mentions postmodern theorists such as Haraway or Deleuze and Guattari, but Cyberpunk and Cyberculture is effective not because it presents any new or sustained readings of such theorists but because it is informed by a sound understanding of the points of contact within the overall landscape of postmodern theory. Cavallaro considers postmodern thought and

cyberpunk fiction in relation to a variety of cybercultural phenomena, such as MUDs and MOOs, design practices, cyberhostesses, SCI-ART, medical imaging technologies, the art of H.R. Giger, reproductive technologies, feminist virtual reality and movies that include RoboCop, Blade Runner and The Matrix. At times, some of the connections established by Cavallaro are more suggestive than substantial. For example, Cavallaro's discussion of how the binary code of digital maps undermines the Western metaphysics of presence is fascinating, but its ostensible relation to cybercultural urbanology is underdeveloped. It is more common, however, for Cavallaro's analyses to make convincing arguments about the common ground of material and philosophical transformation within contemporary cyberculture. Cavallaro's references to Jonathan Raban's *Soft City*, in which Raban argues that the soft city of our psychological constructs co-exists with the material city, illustrate the compelling nature of Cavallaro's argument because they suggest how the conjunction of the real and the virtual that we find in Gibson's fiction shapes the contemporary urban landscape.

Despite sustained discussions of cyberculture, *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture* reads more like a piece of literary criticism than technological sociology or even cultural theory. Discussions of cyberculture serve to legitimate the work of cyberpunk fiction rather than coalesce into a consistent position on the role of technology on society. In chapters on cyberpunk's relation to the city and the Gothic in particular, Cavallaro's use of cyberculture opens up many innovative and telling critical perspectives on Gibson's fiction. Cavallaro brings together a number of effective references to Venice, which include sources ranging from Jeanette Winterson to Richard Goy, in order to indicate the paradigmatic nature of this cybercity. Such contextualization enhances Cavallaro's discussion of Gibson's portrayal of Venice in *Idoru* in that it shows how the shifting nature of Gibson's urban landscapes is an extension of the spatial pressures and influences that impact a city like Venice. Cavallaro also makes an effective argument regarding the self-similarity between Gibson's representations of cybercities and the narrative structure of his fiction. In breaking down the narrative of Gibson's *Count Zero* into patterns of recursiveness and randomness, Cavallaro demonstrates the fractal nature of this novel. While it is not unprecedented to speak of cyberpunk narrative in terms of chaos theory, Cavallaro makes some distinctive suggestions about the applicability of the combined theories of catastrophe, crisis and chaos when analyzing cyberpunk fiction. Even more distinctive is Cavallaro's discussion of cyberpunk and the Gothic. Whereas elsewhere Cavallaro insists upon the fictional elements of technology, here the technological dimension of the Gothic is emphasized. For Cavallaro, Gothic culture is technological in that it concerns how environments are made and destroyed. Cavallaro clearly shows how the making and unmaking of cyberpunk landscapes echoes the architectural drawings of Piranesi and other Gothic spaces such as the labyrinth and the ruin. The neofeudalism of the world represented by cyberpunk has been addressed by Darko Suvin and others, yet Cavallaro succeeds in bringing new insight into this topic by contextualizing the aristocratic families of Gibson's fiction within the Gothic critique of the bourgeois family. Such new insights constitute the most exciting aspect of *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture*, but this book will also be useful to those who are looking for a broad overview of the cultural extensions of cyberpunk fiction.

作者介绍:

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评论

深度广度都不错

赛博朋克入门经典。讨论的议题很多，深度适中。从小说到学术涉及面都很广。

书评