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No Maps for These Territories

By Mark Neale

Bill? Are you there?

Hello, I'm here.

I'm here in the backseat...

I think of a question on a lot of peoples' minds right now is simply:
what the hell is going on?

We're sort of on some kind of cusp
of change that I assume is technologically driven.

It's not legislated change...

What will be...

what will become of us, you and me?

It's just happening.

We're in...we're in something. We're in something here,
and it's...it's out of control.

Bill? Are you there?

Hello...

How might humans become post-human?

Technology based in its assumed... to be the result
of the advent of "functional nanotechnology,"
or of some sort of a synergism in...

in these various emerging...

all these different emerging technologies. We have...somehow...

if somehow there could be a synergism between
computation and genetic research

What might that mean?

Well, immortality, the end of economics...

functional nanotech would pretty much guarantee both of those
because there would be, you know, no reason to die
if you had sufficient nanotech to keep resetting
the little cellular clocks.

And, with even, even sort of half-assed nanotech,
you could make anything out of anything.

So, you could make gold bars out of McDonald's burgers,
and McDonald's burgers out of garbage.

And there'd be...there's no basis for this whole
thing that we've always done about value.

Anyone could have anything... anything they wanted at any time.

And everything, including human beings,
would be completely protean.

We could look and act like anything at all.

It's a compelling vision, but it's not just one that I'm able to get...
get my head around

There's no traction for me there. It's the point where
I really do belong to "The Old Order."

Well, I think what I'm most aware of

is...is the extent to which
people are unaware of
the extent to which they've been interpenetrated
and co-opted by their technology
And I take it for granted that I've... that I've been.
But I don't think most... I think most people...
I think a lot of people...
a lot of people today have as this sort of a
Rousseau-esque
idea that it's possible for humans to return to...
to "The Natural State." But, in fact, I think...it's it's not,
and if it were, they really wouldn't like it.
I mean, I'm immune to a number of really,
really terrible diseases
because I was inoculated against them as a child. That's technology.
I'm...I'm a male human in my 50's, and I still have most of my teeth.
That's technology.
I'm myopic, to the point of near-blindness, and yet I can see.
And that's tech...that's technology. It's too close to us to be very aware
of it.
If we were suddenly...if we could be stripped of it
which we can't be, because it's actually altered our physical being
we'd be pretty unhappy, you know?
And we'd start... we'd start dying, big-time.
he strange thing it may be a byproduct of what I do for a living
but I probably worry less about "The Real Future" than the average person.
We've gotten to the point where in some ways, it's not knowable.
When I was a kid, we were told that it was.
That was when, you know,
when the Future with a capital "F" was a...
was very much a going concern in North America.
That was a part of our culture in the '50s, that the future was coming,
and it was going to be planned.
It was going to happen because grown-ups were making decisions.
My childhood, sort of, was split down the middle by the Cold War.
So there was one future that was very, very much the future of the Willy
Ley Rockets,
Missiles and Space-Travel books.
And the other future was a sort of atomic wasteland.
I mean, it's very easy, it's amazingly easy for me to forget that
I lived most of my life
accepting that the world could quite literally,
and horribly, end any moment.
1... 2... 3... 4...

The only memory I have of a world prior to media is of standing in a peanut field on a farm in Tennessee, looking down the hill at a black, 1950s, sort of, late '40s panel truck, driving along the road. One of the next earliest memories is of my father bringing home this wooden, box-like thing, with a cloth grille on the front, and a little round, circular television screen, which, I believe, we had for some time prior to there actually being any broadcast to... to receive.

And then there was a test pattern. I think the test pattern... and the test pattern itself was only available briefly, at scheduled times.

And people... neighbors, would come, and they would look at this static, non-moving pattern on the screen that...promised something.

And then television came.

It's funny... I walked out of the Matrix last night and went to an ATM and got some money out of my checking account in Vancouver, without even using a credit card, just using a bank courtesy card.

And the ATM in Santa Monica told me exactly how much money was remaining in..

.in my account in Vancouver. And just for a minute, it struck me as miraculous and kind of spooky

I had that kind of feeling of, you know, that kind of post-geographical feeling.

I think we've been growing a sort of prosthetic, extended nervous system for the last hundred years or so.

And it's really starting to take, you know?

It's...it's really, really starting to grow, now.

We're dealing with something that's... that has penetrated virtually every... every corner of the human universe, now.

It's increasingly difficult to find people who have not been affected by media.

It's very difficult to find "non-mediated" human beings. Whereas, in the 1920's, you could go back in the Appalachians and record musicians who had never heard recorded music.

And I think that music, those early recordings,

sound fundamentally different.
Something very...something very different
was going on then. And something changed.
I remember once, I was very,
very struck by finding a diary entry,
finding a diary entry somewhere that...
a man had...a man had heard a Victrola for the first time.
An English clergyman had gone to a garden party, and he'd heard an Edison,
Victrola. And he'd come home and was just completely traumatized by it.
And he described it as being, you know...
he said that he had heard "A voice from Hell":
this "undead, hideous parody of the human voice,"
and that mankind was "doomed," and, "how could God let such things be?"
And he was, like, completely sincere.
I doubt if he would've had the same reaction, you know, the next time
around.
But, you know, this diary entry caught him at exactly the...
on the cusp of the change.
We don't, you know...we don't find it extraordinary that
we can hear the voices of the dead whenever we wish to.
"Non-Mediated World" has become a lost country.
And I think that, in some very real way,
it's a country that we cannot find our way back to.
The mediated world is now THE WORLD.
We are that which perceives a mediated reality.
I don't think it's possible...I don't think it's possible to know what
we've lost.
We just have...I think there is a pervasive...
there is a pervasive sense of loss,
and a pervasive excitement at what we seem to be gaining.
And they seem...those two feelings seem to go together,
in effect, to be parts of the same feeling.
It's like Frederic Jameson's "postmodern divide": you have it right there.
That sense of loss, and that sense of Christmas morning, at the same time.
I think that most people, myself included, are most comfortable,
conceptually,
living about ten years back from whatever point in time we've reached.
And I think we all have these...these moments that
are vertiginous and terribly exciting,
and very frightening, in which we realize the contemporary, absolutely.
And I think it induces terror and ecstasy, and we retreat,
we retreat from it, because we can't stay.
We can't stay in that state of panic, which is,
I think, the real response to what's happening to us.

We're most comfortable with an earlier version of who we were, and what we were. It makes us feel more in...more in control. I think the last time...the last time I had one of those "CNN moments," where I was slammed right up against the windshield of... of the present, would have been flipping on the television one day, and seeing that Federal Building in Oklahoma City lying there in its own... own crater, and listening to a little bit of the audio, and... and getting the idea that something, something bad had happened in Middle America. And I had...some...very, very deep within me, something seemed to say, "Everything is different from now on. Something, something very fundamental has changed, here." Somehow it upped the... Whenever this... whenever something like this happens, and I have one of these moments, it ups the ante on being a science-fiction writer. It changes... it changes the nature of the game. Another example maybe a better one, in a way was when it was confirmed that Michael Jackson was going to marry Elvis Presley's daughter. A good friend of mine in the States faxed me, and he simply... he said, "This makes your job more difficult." And I knew exactly, I knew exactly what he meant. 'Cos something that seemed to...a scenario that seemed to belong to the universe of the late Terry Southern, was suddenly, suddenly real. It's that "truth-is-stranger-than-fiction" factor keeps getting jacked up on us on a fairly regular, maybe even exponential, basis. And I think that's a peculiar... that's something that's something that's peculiar to our time. I don't think our grandparents had to live with that. The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel. "It's not like I'm using," Case heard someone say, as he shouldered his way through the crowd around the door of the Chat. "It's like my body's developed this massive drug deficiency." It was a Sprawl voice and a Sprawl joke. The Chatsubo was a bar for professional expatriates; you could drink there for a week and never hear two words in Japanese. Ratz was tending bar, his prosthetic arm jerking monotonously as he filled a tray of glasses with draft Kirin. He saw Case and smiled, his teeth a webwork of East European steel and brown decay.

Well it sounds like something. It sounds good...
it sounds like something that was written in the 1940s, somehow.
It really is kind of weirdly Chandler-esque.
So what would you say now about that piece of writing,
and the man who wrote it?
I dunno, you know. I'd buy 'im a drink, but I don't know if I'd loan 'im
any money.
I think of NEUROMANCER as being,
in a good sense, an adolescent book.
It's a young man's book. It was written...
a very young man's book...that was written by a man who was not very young
when he wrote it, but who was sufficiently immature
to still get back there and get a hold of that stuff.
The bartender's smile widened. His ugliness was the stuff of legend.
In an age of affordable beauty, there was something heraldic about his lack
of it.
The antique arm whined as he reached for another mug.
It was a Russian military prosthesis, a seven-function force-feedback
manipulator,
cased in grubby pink plastic.
"You are too much the artiste, Herr Case." Ratz grunted;
the sound served him as laughter.
He scratched his overhang of white-shirted belly with the pink claw.
"You are the artiste of the slightly funny deal."
"Sure," Case said, and sipped his beer.
"[Someone's] gotta be funny around here. Sure the fuck isn't you."
The whore's giggle went up an octave.
"Isn't you either, sister. So you vanish, okay?
Zone, he's a close personal friend of mine."
It's a world without...
it's a world where there aren't families.
It's, you know, it's the world of a...it's the world of a young person,
going out into the wilderness of cities, and sort of, in a way, creating...
creating a family.
It's very, you know, it's kind of like... it's kind of like, not that it's
a "Goth" book,
but it's kind of out of the same stuff that makes...
makes kids be Goths.
I think of NEUROMANCER as kind of a rock 'n' roll book.
Its got everything...its got sex, its got the drugs...
its got the sense of alienation.
In that sense, it is truly rock 'n' roll.
As Case was picking up his beer,
one of those strange instants of silence descended,

as though a hundred unrelated conversations
had simultaneously arrived at the same pause.
Then the whore's giggle rang out, tinged with a certain hysteria.
Ratz grunted. "An angel passed."
"The Chinese," bellowed a drunken Australian,
"Chinese bloody invented nerve-splicing.
Give me the mainland for a nerve job any day. Fix you right, mate..."
"Now that," Case said to his glass,
all his bitterness suddenly rising in him like bile,
"that is so much bullshit."
It owes a lot of its effectiveness as an experience
to the fact that I didn't know what I was doing.
It's a first novel...
and I just had to put one foot after another.
I was just terrified, actually, by it. It was very scary.
I think the disappointment that I sometimes sense
in younger readers who find NEUROMANCER and really, really like it,
and then find my later work, and they're like,
"Whoa! Why can't you please do more...do more like this?"
And I have to say, "Well, I just can't!"
you know. I...I don't have access...
I don't have access to that material now,
and if I did, I would probably be in grave trouble.
It just wouldn't be natural...wouldn't be natural.
it'd be bad news if I could,
if that's where I was. In a way, it was...
I think it was, personally
it was kind of bad news at the time that
I was where I was then, at that...at that age.
Initially, I had a lot of reluctance toward going
toward going for it.
And I think that I still had that reluctance up
until I met Bruce Sterling
and was introduced to, through Bruce, to some other writers who were trying
to do something similar.
And just having company you know, a little fellowship
went a longwent a long way.
When Louis Shiner and I, who were part
of the Turkey City group here in Austin
were first reading Gibsons work in manuscript,
we looked at it and said,
Look, you know, this is breakthrough material here.
This guys really doing something different.
Like, we gotta put down our preconceptions and pick up on

this guy from Vancouver. Its the way forward!
A hole had opened up in consensus reality,
and we just, like, saw daylight
When I was writing Burning Chrome, the short story that intro
you know, where the word cyberspace firstfirst appeared,
I knew as soon as I had the opening scene
that I actually had a completely original piece.
In the early days when he used to send me short stories,
I would send them around to people, and I would sort of give them copies of
OMNI that had his stories in them, and send them to people and sort of seek
out their response.
And people were just genuinely baffled
You know I sat there thinking, Nobodys ever done this.
I mean, they literally could not parse the guys paragraphs.
They could not make sense ofthey didnt understand
concepts like cyberspace, for instance,
that there was a simulated space, which was inside the computer.
I mean, they literally could not get their heads around that concept.
I mean, What was the problemare they hallucinating?
Is it a real space? I mean, these
just these sort ofimaginative tropes,
which he was inventing and deploying,
were just beyond peoples grasp.
I met Bruce Sterling at a science fiction
convention in Denver in the fall of 1981,
and read, uh,
Burning Chrome, the first cyberspace short story,
to an audience of four people:
Sterling, his wife, a friend of mine, and some baffled stranger.
And it was, like, the most fun I think I ever had reading
reading anything, because Bruce completely got it.
We were aware that computers were a bigger
social revolution in the making than space flight
was ever going to be, or that robots ever had been.
No one seemed to have noticed
that there was a territory there.
Yeah, when we were first hanging out with computer geeks,
it was not something you spoke about in public.
I mean, reallyif you went to a party and started
talking about your Apple II, people would walk off diagonally
We turned out to be great glamorizers.
We were able to make computers glamorous.
Andand of course, we werent the only ones.
I mean, once people caught on that that was possible, you had

Madison Avenue move into the job.
AT&T hires people to tell people that, now.
Its, you know, its become a very mainstream message.
I had a hunch that it was going to change things in a way that
the advent of the ubiquity of the automobile changed things.
It changed how we dressed, how we eat
it affects these things affect everything.
I mean, this was a supermodel among technologies.
It was just a matter of spraying on the hairspray,
and slapping on some lip-gloss, and this thing was gonna walk, you know?
They were gonna be cute. They were gonna be miniature.
They would be designed.
They would be adorable, you know.
The boundaries of the human body would be crossed.
What made you choose science fiction rather
than some other form of fiction?
Well, I was it was my native literary culture,
and it was what I had grown up on.
I saw it as a viable, but essentially derelict
form of popular art.
And I thought that that was that was a remarkable thing.
I probably started looking at what was being done
then in science fiction, around 1976 or 77.
I saw an opening, you know?
I thought, Hmm, you know, I can fill the gap here.
Maybe I can do something
maybe I can do something with this.
That was the conscious part of it.
The unconscious part of it, I dont know.
I know that it seemed it seemed a weird and pathetic thing
to try to do
Were you still a student when you first got published?
Yeah. I figured out that I could make a living,
or augment my living by being a student,
which was possible in Canada at that time.
If you could maintain a high enough grade point average,
they were very generous.
You know, theyd give you loans and then forgive them.
You know. In fact, I wasnt even really studying; I was just making
maintaining a grade point average and reading, reading books.
You came to Canada to dodge the draft, didnt you?
Well, I had a peculiar experience with that.
I had gone in and basically
told them the truth.

I told them that that my one ambition in life was to take every mind-altering substance that existed on the face of the planet, and I just went in and babbled about babbled about wanting to be like William Burroughs. That seemed to do the trick. That, and the fact that I promptly, you know, within a week or two, exited the country for several years. You know, I was very, very lucky in the timing of that, because if I had turned up at an induction center two years later with with the same line, they would have said, Dont worry, sonwell make a man of you. And they wouldvethey wouldnt have even let me back out the building. And I went home and bought a bus ticket to Toronto. But I dont like to take too much too much credit for that having been a political act, in the sense that political acts are are sometimes understood. It had much more to do with my wanting wanting to be with hippie girls and have lots of hashish, than it did with my sympathy for the plight of the the North Vietnamese people under U.S. imperialism. Much more, much more to do with hippie girls and hashish. Consequently, when I got to Toronto, I actually to my, I think, chagrin, somewhat I found that it was I really, really couldnt handle hanging out with the American draft-dodgers. There was too much clinical depression. There was too much suicide. There was too much hardcore substance abuse. They were a traumatized lot, those boys. And I just felt like ayou know, I felt frivolous. Torontos Summer of Love was it was up there with San Franciscos, I would imagine. It was really quite ait was quite a party. From an alternative mode of perception, most of the people I suppose, really, everyone that I counted as a close friend seemed to harbor the unspoken assumption that everything that had gone before us was ending. It was really a very millennial time, far more millennial than this last year of the century.

What did you think was ending?

The Straight World.

I think that's what I would have told you at the time.

But the straight world didn't end.

The straight world and the other world

bled into one another and produced

the world that we live in today.

Drugs were absolutely central to

to that, to that experience.

But they weren't essential.

They weren't actually essential to it. I only know that in retrospect.

At the time I'm sure I would have said that they were

you know, ingesting the right chemical was absolutely,

absolutely essential to the experience.

But, in retrospect, no.

It's simply a matter of simply a matter of being there,

and being somewhat open, open to possibilities.

What you couldn't have told me at that stage of my life

what I couldn't have told me at that stage in my life that I've subsequently

come to

come to accept is that

all drugs

all any drug amounts to is tweaking the incoming data.

And you have to be you have to be

really incredibly self-centered,

or pathetic, to be satisfied with simply

tweaking the incoming data.

Enough of the right drug, and anything is groovy.

Enough of the right drug, and it's okay to be having open-heart surgery.

Well, you know, who wants who wants that?

My experience has been that, beyond

a certain point, there's only pathology.

You're not dealing with a personality anymore;

you're dealing with a kind of hardwired

hardwired pathology

You're you're dealing with a chemical entity, a neurochemical entity.

It doesn't really have much to do with the who is a person

manifesting in was.

Recreational drugs are essentially a wank,

and a wank is okay,

but you really should know that it's just a wank.

And I think that's what we didn't

what we didn't know, to use the generational

we and what some of us still don't know.

I was kept from the opiates by having read Burroughs.
I knew from even before I had ever tried any mind-altering substances that heroin was really addictive, and that you thought it wasn't when you began to take it but then you discovered that it was. You know, the opiates aside, I tried whatever was going. You know, I sort of prided myself on it. In fact, I was sort of a very regular cannabis user for a number of years, in spite of the fact that I always had a terrible time with it. And, you know, I've long since come to realize that that I suffer from cannabis dysphoria. Like, the lowest possible dose of cannabinal makes me incredibly uncomfortable and unhappy. I think it's just easier to die doing that stuff than people are, you know, people are comfortable admitting. You know, at least people who like to do that stuff. A certain number of people do their accustomed dose of cocaine, or sometimes even their very first dose of cocaine, and simply drop dead! You know, a certain percentage of people do. It's kind of like, you know, the street drug thing is you know, when did you ever hear a drug dealer when did you ever go to a drug dealer and the drug dealer says, You know, you should come back tomorrow, this is not very pure. It's not too good tonight come next week. It doesn't happen. Where are we? This is Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, the closest thing closest thing to a city near where my parents were living in a beach house, when I was born in 1948. This was a farm that my parents had rented, I believe, while my father's construction company put in a lot of these civilian sort of workaday plumbing around the Oak Ridge Atomic Project. My father was working there during the production of the bombs, I believe. Army Jeep of some kind This is in Virginia Beach or nearby, which is where I lived just prior to my father's death in '56. Upon his death, within a matter of days,

my mother had packed, uh, packed everything up
and taken me back to Wytheville,
which is a town both my parents came from,
in SouthwestSouthwest Virginia.
She stayed there for the rest of her life.
My mothers death, when I was nineteen,
coincided, really, with the beginning of
the beginning of what we think of as the Sixties.
I was in a boarding school
in Tucson, Arizona,
and we would see the people coming and going from San Francisco.
You know, you couldnt miss them, really.
There had never been people in America who looked like that.
And they looked like they were having a pretty good time.
So, I knew already that something was going on
no one had given it a name yet.
What was going onwhat was going on inside me,
and what was going on in the world outside, were very, very confused for
me.
I had no way ofI had no way of sorting,
sorting those things out.
You know, it just seemed like the
inside of my head was going off,
and the outside was going off as well.
II know I became very, very isolated for a long time.
I mean, I do, really do think I
maybe its just a middle-aged thing, but
Im inclined to think that I was crazy,
at some level, for a long time.
But its only become
its only become apparent to me relatively,
you know, relatively late in life
And its only become apparent
because I no longer feel that I am crazy.
What makes you anxious these days?
I think the thing that makes me most anxious
at this point in my life is
the thought that I might not
be able to become
as honest with myself as
I would like to, as I would like to become.
Because I think that more real is always
is always better.
Andbutits not necessarily given to us as individuals

to be, always be, more real.
Im not a didactic writer, I hope.
Theres nothing nothing I want less to be than
than someone couching a conscious message in prose fiction.
But I think one of the
one of the things that I see when I look back,
when I look back at my earlier work, is a
a struggle to recognize, and accept,
that the heart is the master,
and the head is the servant,
and that is always the case.
Except when it isnt the case,
were in deep, deep trouble.
And were often in deep, deep trouble.
So, thats the waythats the way it starts
to look to me, now, when I look back at it.
But I wouldnt have been able to articulate
that twenty years ago.
Ladies and gentlemen, there is no cause for alarm.
Did you read William Burroughs last piece?
[Love? what is it? Most natural painkiller what there is. Love.]
Yeah, I thought it was absolutely extraordinary
It was so wonderful that I almost didnt believe it.
It was so much what I wouldve
wanted his last words to be.
Burroughs death was something that I had anticipated
for many, many years as being
I didnt know what would happen to me.
Its, you knowin some way that I cant explain,
he was just terribly, terribly
terribly, terribly important to me.
But when he went,
it was okay.
I mean, I was okay.It was okay.
I just felt, Okay.Thats, likeits okay. Hes gone.
I didnt haveI didnt have a sense of loss,
and I didnt I dont think I
I didnt really have to grieve.
But it wasit was a real milestone for me.
I had a sense that he had had a couple of
really deep, really powerful resolutions
that came to him, came to him very late.
One piece of his I read, he spoke of
no, it might have been an interview he spoke of going

into a sweat lodge ceremony, possibly a series of them,
and being relieved, finally, of that which
he had always referred to as The Ugly Spirit.
And before he died, he spoke quite movingly,
and lovingly, of his wife, whom he had killed
in a blackout in Mexico City.
And he seemed to have come to terms with that.
It just seemed that, at the end of his life
at the end of his life, he was
he was okay.

What about the rest of us?

What's going to save the rest of us?

Acceptance.

Acceptance of the impermanence of being,
and acceptance of the the imperfect nature
of being.

Or possibly the perfect nature of being, depending on how one
how one looks at it.

Acceptance that this is not a rehearsal for the
that this is it. This is the deal. This is your life.

Basically, I don't know. You know, all the fridge magnets
of the New Age have a certain
a kernel of truth in them, I think.

What about religion?

I remember

consciously

consciously rejecting it

at some point when I was twelve,
or thirteen, or fourteen years old,
insofar as I decided that that was not
whatever

whatever might be going on,
it wasn't going on for me
in The Church.

That wasn't where it

wasn't where it was happening.

And that's kind of continued as a constant
for me,

that I don't feel like it's happening in The Church.

Although, I think it can whatever

It is, that it can happen there,

perhaps, you know, in spite of all odds.

I think of religions as

I think of religions as franchise operations.

Sort of like chicken, chicken franchises.
Andbut that doesnt mean
that theres no chicken, right?
Its difficult to
its difficult to articulate.
Actually, by the time you get it reduced to something,
by the time you get it reduced to something that that you can
you can talk about, you dont really
you dont really have anything.
I mean, language is such an extraordinary thing,
but at the same time, its just like
giant monkeys standing up and
making noises that sound like GOD.
Like, what does thatwhat does that convey?
Whats happiness to you?
Hmmm. Happiness is, I think
happiness is being in the moment,
and not beingnot living in anticipation,
and not living in recollection,
but being inin the moment.
Which is,
you knowsounds very simple, but the actual practice
of it can become incredibly complicated.
And I dont think anyone really achieves it
achieves it with any constancy.
When I first started trying to write,
I remember going to a
going to a professor of mine
and saying,
How do people do this?
How do people ever do this?
I dont understand
how do fiction writers do this?
And he looked at me.
He looked at me a while and then he said,
They have rich inner lives, I think.
It was extremely painful.
It was extremely strange andand painful.
And, I, in retrospect,
I dont really understand why I persisted.
I took it very seriously, and went away and started thinking about
what sort of rich inner life one would have to have.
I felt that I had no native
no native talent for it.

It came so it came so hard to me,
and yet I wanted, you know, I desperately wanted to be a writer,
and to be able to be a writer of fiction.
But why did you want to be a writer?
I dont know.
I really dont know. It was just,
you know, it was there.
I had beenI had been a reader all my life, you know?
And if
if you could make a living being a reader,
like, being a really good reader,
Id be, like, you know, really comfortably off
from being a reader,
and I wouldnt have had to become a writer
something like that.
Like many people who had been lifetime readers,
I had aspired to
to be a writer. But I dont know why.
What I found I had to do,
to start to write fiction, was to rediscover
the mechanism of daydreaming-as-play,
that I had had as a child.
And there arent too many activities
that resemble writing fiction.
I think a childs daydreams, or
someones masturbation fantasies, might be
might be the closest, you know,
in terms of using actual parts of the
parts of the brain.
Those are similarsimilar models.
I think the process ofof, uh, fantasies of anxiety,
probably, are a similarsimilar thing.
Imagining yourself having a very hard time,
and getting into a great detail in order to make it more
convincing and increase your anxiety.
That probably uses a uses some similar
takes up some similar territory in the brain.
I initially started
started by trying to write little units
units of fiction.
And I remember, you know, labouring for months
on end on an opening sentence,
and being very frustrated with it, and finally getting something:
this very long and over-elaborated

sentence, which went nowhere.

It was something like

something like

Seated each afternoon in the darkened screening room,

Halliday came to recognise the targetted

numerals of the Academy leader as

sigils preceding the dream state of film.

And I actually worked on that so long,

that I could still remember it,

remember it twenty-some years later.

And it went nowhere at all.

I mean, that was simply it.

It was like one of those Ballardian paragraph-stories.

nd it was very consciously Ballardian.

It was like a little, little pastiche of J.G. Ballard.

But it went nowhere, and I remember wondering about that.

Like, how did one introduce movement?

And I just kept kept going

kept going back to, you know,

kept going back to the

that activity, and trying different things.

Until, finally, it started, it started to move a little bit.

What I did with movementbecause

I became so frustrated with my inability to physically move the

characters through the imaginary narrative space,

that I actually developed an early form,

in my fiction, a sort of early form of imaginary

VR technology.

That served to, you know that sort of covered my ass,

in terms of not being able to move the characters,

cos they could simply change channels.

And it was some sort of recorded-memory technology.

And all they had to do was switch tapes,

and theyd be in a different

theyd be in a different place.

And I was spared the embarrassment of demonstrating

that I didnt know how to get them up and down stairs,

in and out of vehicles at that point.

So, in a way, that sort of invention began

began out of necessity and inexperience.

But it opened up an interesting territory.

Id gotten to a point

Id gotten to a point in my early fiction and, you know, were really

talking, like, two or three

two or three attempted short stories and I'd gotten
I'd gotten to a point where I needed a buzzword.
I needed to replace the rocketship and the holodeck
with something else that would be a signifier of technological change,
and that would provide me with a narrative engine,
and a territory in which the narrative could take place.
And I didn't realize I don't think I realized that
quite what a tall order that was. And in the way that
people sometimes do, I solved the problem in a very offhand
in a very offhand way.

All I really knew about the word cyberspace
when I coined it was that it seemed like an effective buzzword.
It was evocative and essentially meaningless.
It was very suggestive of it was suggestive, of something,
but it had, like, no, you know...
no real semantic meaning, even for me, as I saw it emerge on the page.
But it's not just the word, it's the idea of a virtual reality inside a
computer network.

Where did that come from?

My input for doing that was, uh, my experience of the very first SONY
Walkman

as a really intimate interface device that I could carry around.
My observation of the body language of kids playing those early,
plywood-sided arcade games

I saw the kids playing those games and I knew
that they wanted to reach right through the screen and get with what they
were playing with there.

And I thought, Well, if there's space behind the screen,
and everybody's got these things at some level, maybe only metaphorically,
those spaces are all the same space.

And as soon as I thought that I, you know I had it.

It's interesting that it's become common parlance.

I had no idea.

I had no idea that that would happen.

It's a strange thing for me. I mean, I see it

I see it in every newspaper

that I open. It's become part of the language.

which is very, which is very nice but I simply marvel that that's
happened.

Cos I had no idea. I had no idea that no one else would do it.

It's a very singular and peculiar thing.

Cyberspace, one day, might be the last usage of the...

prefix, cyber,

because cyber is, I think, cyber is going to go the way of electro.

We dont use the prefixwe dont use the prefix electro in
in pop-cultural parlance much anymore.

Electricity beingit being taken for granted that most things are
electrical.

And I think that, at this point, it could be most
taken for granted that most things are computerized.

William Gibson's limousine...good morning?

Err...Jack Womack, here.

[Jack Womack - Writer] Hello, Jack. Tell me...would you describe William
Gibson as a "visionary"?

I would definitely call him a "visionary."

I mean, it's like, you know...

I quite honestly feel that if he had not written NEUROMANCER when he did,
that the world as it is, and much more about the world which is to come,
would not have taken place in the exact way it has.

We would have, uh, computers.

We would have the Internet. We would have cyberspace as it presently
exists.

But I think of so many people who weren't in computers at that point,
writing, working away on their programs,
writing away on their designs, thinking of what might be done with this new
media.

if they hadn't read NEUROMANCER and thought,

"Boy, what a cool idea this is...let's see if we can't make it happen,"
I'm not sure that precisely things would be happening in the same way.
So it was less about predicting and more about affecting the shape of
things to come?

He and I have talked about that and, uh... you know...

and he told me. He said, you know, "When I first thought of cyberspace, I
thought of it as a metaphor."

And then NEUROMANCER came out,

and everyone said, "Huh! Oh, dude, this is very cool,"
and took it seriously.

As you know, something beyond just the fashion to wear for that season.
They just, uh, took it as something very, very real.

Initially, it was just, like, a literary conceit.

I've always been marketed as "Your Hot Ticket to the Future."

And because I've been so uncomfortable with that,

I've had to, you know, I devote a lot of time to attempting to debunk my
own...

my own sort of "inherited marketing category."

Because I don't think that's what I do. I think we live in an
incomprehensible present.

And what I'm actually trying to do is eliminate the moment,

and...and make the moment accessible.
I'm not even really trying to explain the moment.
I'm just trying to...trying to make it accessible.
Laney looked at the tweaked Hillman on his screen.
"You haven't told me what I'm looking for."
"Anything that might be of interest to Slitscan,
which is to say, Laney, anything that might be of interest to Slitscan's
audience."
Slitscan...the fictional culture of Slitscan is my extrapolation from the
existence of People magazine,
The National Enquirer and Hello!...that sort of thing. It's just pushed...
all the knobs have been cranked over in my version
and the brakes are off. And that's the result.
"Anything that might be of interest to Slitscan's audience.
Which is to say, Laney,
anything that might be of interest to Slitscan's audience.
Which is best visualized as a vicious, lazy, profoundly ignorant,
perpetually hungry organism craving the warm god-flesh of the anointed.
Personally, I like to imagine something the size of a baby hippo,
the color of a week-old boiled potato, that lives by itself, in the dark,
in a double-wide on the outskirts of Topeka. It's covered with eyes, and it
sweats constantly.
The sweat runs into those eyes and makes them sting.
It has no mouth, Laney, no genitals,
and can only express its mute extremes of murderous rage and infantile
desire,
by changing the channels on a universal remote, or by voting in
presidential elections."
This is now...that's now, you know. That's...that's, like, the end of the
'90s.
But to me, it's not so much about defining the Slitscan audience,
which is the audience for this highly vicious form of tabloid
TV journalism
but of defining the producer's contempt for her audience.
What do you find yourself focusing on these days?
I think I find myself thinking more in historical terms.
I've sort of been looking at, you know,
where this whole crazy thing came from. All these cities...
I think I'm happiest in...I'm happiest in cities,
because they don't oppress me, generally, at all.
They really...they really fascinate me.
I think of cities as machines.
Each one is a...is a sort of mechanism.
Sometimes, walking, walking through Manhattan, I'm just...

I've been struck with just some very simple kind of wonder and amazement - at the fact that this thing works! That, you know, that it's possible to have something as singular, and crazy, as Manhattan island. And, by and large, it works. You know, people walking around, doing...doing what they do. Have you been to Detroit? No, but I've seen pictures. The urban core, you know, the skyscraper core of Detroit is... it's a ruin. It's a complete...a complete Ghost Town. Someone proposed several years ago that the place simply be allowed to fall apart, and that it would be "The American Acropolis." And, of course, the good burghers of Detroit flipped out and said, "You can't do that; the Downtown is coming back! You gotta have faith...we have this beautiful city." But they can't get anybody to live there. There's nobody, nobody after dark but a few homeless people, and some deer that have wandered in from the country. It's like the city's turning back into countryside, there. I find this a pretty haunted, haunted neighborhood. All these big cinemas turned into wholesale jewelry stores. This was all very grand in the sort of 1911, 1920s. There's the Union Trust Company, there, which is now Hill Center Mart was built with this optimism that expected it to be used for... the purpose it was intended for, for obviously, for hundreds of years. And the building is still hanging together perfectly well. It's just that Union Trust has long moved on, and migrated to...migrated to cyberspace, probably. I don't have a very conscious creative process at all. It doesn't, those books don't...those books don't happen because I think about them. I'm more and more...more and more conscious lately that they happen...books happen because I write them. And the...the genuinely creative parts emerge from the actual process of putting one word after another. Than the bits that I enjoy, which are the bits that surprise me and that I didn't, you know, that I didn't expect - they come out of the actual process of writing. They don't come out of... they don't come out of a process of cogitating,

and consciously trying to be visionary, or imagining what the future would be like.

They just emerge from...from this very analogue process of one word after another.

I feel that if I'm doing my job, if I'm doing the job that I'm supposed to do, I will not be in control of the narrative.

If I'm really achieving something with the characterization, the characters become impossible to control.

I mean, they start driving, they start driving the action and...and losing the plot.

I have to make a deal with myself that I'll turn up and make a real effort to see if there's any "incoming mail."

But there are times when the process just remains closed to me, and it...it won't happen.

And the conscious part of me, the part of me that's talking to you now, is not really that which writes those books.

I mean...the books are written by me...

the books are written by the guy who's talking to you now... in collaboration with his unconscious.

And I don't have

reliable access to my unconscious, all the time.

I have to wait...I have to wait for it to turn up, sometimes.

at that point, had been in stasis: employed by the management of Lo/Rez, the pop group, to facilitate the singer Rez's "marriage" to the Japanese virtual star Rei Toei,

Laney had settled into a life in Tokyo that centered around visits to a private,

artificially constructed island in Tokyo Bay,

an expensive nub of engineered landfill upon which Rez and Rei Toei intended to bring forth some sort of new reality.

That Laney had never been able to quite grasp the nature of this reality hadn't surprised him.

Rez was a law unto himself, very possibly the last of the pre-posthuman megastars...

It's a very strange...it's a very strange thing we do, when we...when we write novels.

Because this is an act that began somewhere with someone making a mark on a piece of wood,

or a rock, and its grown into millions of millions of marks on sheets of paper

that are bound together,

that, in a trained reader, produce incredibly complicated, complex reactions.

And Laney fell in love with her, although he understood that she had been designed for him to fall in love with. As the amplified reflection of desire, she was a team effort; to the extent that her designers had done their jobs properly, she was a waking dream, a love object sprung from an approximation of the global mass unconscious. If there's been any - any visualization of a text of mine, you know, a film or comic book, or even an... even an illustration I'm always struck by the...the innocence with which some...some readers will say, "But that isn't what it looks like. That's not what she looks like." And it always makes me smile, because I realize when they say that, that they haven't actually realized that they are the creator of what "it" looks like, as much...as much as I am.

"This is human, I think,"

"This is human, I think," she'd said, when pressed.

"This is the result of what you are, biochemically, being stressed in a particular way.

This is wonderful. This is closed to me."

Writing is inherently a collaborative act, because the recipient of the writing will create... create an inner world, according to whatever they're bringing to the text. Ana has set up her "cam," Ana...Ana is a singer and performance artist... Oh yeah...I know her!

Is that how you thought it would turn out?

No! No, not at all.

I mean, I just didn't imagine..

I didn't imagine that art-girls in the Midwest would... would be flashing their tits in cyberspace.

Although, I'm glad they are.

I was in New York, and we were looking at - we were down in the Chelsea Antique Market, looking at Civil War-era pornography... hardcore, like, Matthew Brady hardcore.

And I never knew that this stuff existed.

It ranges from cheesecake, some of which is totally charming, cheesecake, to the...to just the rawest, full-on hardcore.

You know, daguerreotypes.

The technology was new; the technology was there for the first time, to reproduce pornographic...pornographic images.

And because there were these Union armies, that, you know... there were tens, hundreds of thousands of lonely, wanking soldiers, marching across the United States.

So, you know, the American porno industry was born there, I suppose.
Like, its modern, you know, the...
the Larry Flynt world was sort of born on the battlefields of Gettysburg!
And there's a market for this stuff. There's a very serious collector's
market.
And I have a friend named Richard, who's, by day, a dealer in...
a dealer in rare books,
and...and by night, a dealer in Civil War porno.
My friend Richard reminded me once again that...
that new media is always driven by pornography,
almost always. Any new media that gets out into the world
for instance, it wasn't true of television, but television was a broadcast
medium.
As soon as television became home video,
a lot of developments in it, of, like, what you could do with it,
were driven by the desire to create pornography.
He said that, as far as he knew, the most sophisticated marketing and
billing on the Internet
was...was netporn. Those are the guys that have been doing e-commerce all
along.
A couple of years ago, Bruce Sterling came up with a...
with a scenario in which it was discovered that there was no viable way
to make money - really make serious money - on the web.
And the web would become a sort of ghost town,
and it would be re-inherited by the sort of crazy people who...
who were there in the first place. The corporations would all go home, and
it would all be a sort of giant "ghost site."
Well, my understanding,
such as it is, is that the Internet exists today
because DARPA, a federally-funded think tank, was asked by the Pentagon
to create a ()communication system that would survive a major nuclear...
a major nuclear war: global nuclear war.
DARPA came up with the idea of connecting...
connecting the mainframe computers - existing mainframe computers in
universities
in the Western World - in a switching system that would allow the...
the communication to be carried around "problem areas"
say, a Chicago that no longer existed.
And if this switching was sufficiently fast, they would be able to
communicate right through...
right through the event of the nuclear war, regardless of which cities were
being vaporized.
So these university mainframes were connected,
and what we know...what we know today as the Internet,

grew out of that as a completely unplanned side effect.
And I...I rather believe that if the...that side effect could have been foreseen,
the people who ordered, you know, the people who ordered those... those mainframes connected, would've had second thoughts, because it will eventually bring about their extinction, to a large extent. It will bring about the extinction of the nation-state, as...as we know it. And that is an unplanned impact of technology. We're using technology to...
to extend the human nervous system.
We're sort of, you know...the Internet is a kind of global, prosthetic extension of human consciousness.
It wasn't...it wasn't consciously intended as one, but it amounts to one. The Internet, if one could see its totality, I think, would be a very profound expression of what it is to be, to be human today.
But I think it will be...
it's almost meaningless...it's almost meaningless to say even now, because it's become...it's become the place where we do everything. t's become the place where we look for everything.
We're doing something new here. It resembles some things we've done before, but it's...it's different.
think it is probably as big a deal as the...
the creation of cities.
A number of your characters are searching for meaning in cyberspace. Laney, in IDORU, looking for patterns in the flow of data
Gentry, in Mona Lisa Overdrive, looking for the overall shape of cyberspace...
I mean, I think that's for me that's the nature...
that's the nature of experience,
is sensing through all this stuff that we're moving through, some huge structure that's too big,
too big to get a handle on.
And the question is, then, "How important is it?
Why are we...
why are we drawn back to that? Why do we do that?"
You know? Why do we...in evolutionary terms,
why do we do that stuff?
We seem to do it as a...as a species.
What, what is it, what is it in service of?
We've been doing, you know, we've been trying to do that forever.
But why, you know...I wonder why we do it. I mean, here we are, mammals, bipedal mammals with opposable thumbs and overgrown frontal lobes, creating this...this wacky collection of artifacts that we're moving

through, now,
and sitting in, and recording on. Why do we do that?
How... How did it come to be? You know, what is the...
what is the shape of that, if we could see it,
see it from without? Which we can't because we are...we are it.
It's just basic, basic curiosity. What's going on here?
Why am I here? What's it all mean, if anything?
And, I think as...you know, I, in my sort of mid-cult way,
I wrestle with that stuff in my fiction.

[Search]

When we were only several hundred thousand years old,
we built stone circles,
water clocks.

Later, someone forged an iron spring,
set clockwork running.

Imagined gridlines on a globe.

Cathedrals are like machines defining the soul.

Bells of clocktowers stitch the sleeper's dreams together.

You see? So we've always been on our way to this new place,
that is no place, really, but is real.

It's our nature to represent.

We're the animal that represents, the sole and only maker of maps.

And if our weakness has been to confuse the bright and bloody colors
of our calendars with the true weather of days,
and the parchment's territory of our maps
with the land spread out before us...

never mind

We've always been on our way to this new place,
that is no place, really, but is real.

No Maps For These Territories

Timing by WM

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