

Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

Av Helge Ridderstrøm (førsteamanuensis ved OsloMet – storbyuniversitetet)

Sist oppdatert 08.12.20

Dieselpunk

(_estetikk) Ordet er lagd som en parallell til “cyberpunk” og “steampunk”. Estetikken “combines knowledge of the interbellum period [dvs. mellomkrigstida] through World War II and ending before or at the early 1950s with postmodern, contemporary sensibilities” (<http://dieselpunksencyclopedia.wordpress.com/origins-of-dieselpunk/>; lesedato 25.04.13). Denne estetikken fungerer ofte som en hyllest til teknologi og maskiner, til oljealderens overvinnelse av tid og rom med tog, biler, fly og raketter.

“In order to begin analyzing dieselpunk as a serious genre within the literary world of fiction, it is necessary to realize its development from steampunk as well as cyberpunk, both to which dieselpunk owes a lot, as well as from pulp comics and literature published throughout the 1930s, ‘40s and ‘50s. The term that was first coined by Lewis Pollak to describe the fantastical setting of his [datarollespill] *Children of the Sun* became a definitive choice word to encapsulate a form of science fiction that starts with the end of the Roaring Twenties through to the beginning of the Cold War, culminating primarily with the Red Scare of the era and its dread of a nuclear Third World War.” (Piecrafft 2008) “Punk is not a synonym for era; rather the era is defined by the prevalent technology ever present in the context of a science fiction world.” (Piecrafft 2009b) “Some manifestations of dieselpunk are positive, hopeful and emphasize human progress while others are dark, foreboding and frightening.” (<http://dieselpunksencyclopedia.wordpress.com/b-article-the-philosophy-of-dieselpunk/>; lesedato 16.04.13)

“With Hollywood reverting back into its archives for added inspiration for narrative ideas, we find a recent trend of nostalgic hindsight to the age of the Roaring Twenties and the 1930s. This seems to have infiltrated gradually the science fiction genre that is emerging in contemporary cinema. Films like *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (2004) and *The Mutant Chronicles* (2008) [...] films like *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008) and *The Spirit* (2008) have sparked new interest in the previous century, overcast with economic turmoil, lawlessness on the streets and in politics and the ever present dystopian sentiment towards a near-hopeful future with the potential of war hanging in the balance. [...] This is a vision of an atomically-charged future where technology has become the opiate to the masses, especially in regards to engineering and design. We find airplanes or airships as the foremost modes of transportation; the sky in seemingly perpetual darkness from the smog of combustible vehicles; dirty diesel guzzling

locomotives and the petroleum-producing factories dotted across the metropolis-complex. All these elements make up the definitive dieselpunk world.” (Piecrafft 2009a)

“Strictly speaking, dieselpunk is a branch of steampunk in which the stories are set some years after the invention of the diesel engines and after the diffusion of electric current.” (<http://www.ottens.co.uk/gatehouse/Gazette%20-%2018.pdf>; lesedato 26.03.13) “The present “deprecated” technology and resource of fuel and mechanical sustenance is a drawback to the times before the great technological boom perpetuated by the megalomaniacal obsession and propulsion of the diesel empowered world of the mid twentieth century. [...] such machinery was literally the oil that greased the cogs for the momentum of a futuristic technocratic society – one which would befall the events that take place in the *Mad Max* series, *Diesel* (1985), and *Spirits of the Air, Gremlins of the Clouds* (1989). The destruction of the urban sprawl formed by such technologies and social highs that eventually bring about their own demise promoted in such films as *Metropolis* (1927) and *Tetsuo* (1989) [...] *Dark City* (1998), directed by Alex Proyas, is perhaps the epitome of the darker nature of dieselpunk.” (Piecrafft 2009a)

“The term ‘dieselpunk’ was invented by *Children of the Sun*-game designer Lewis Pollak in 2001, to describe the steampunkesque character of his video game. Dieselpunk, however, according to Pollak, is “darker [and] dirtier” than steampunk; a world “of grit and oil, dust and mud [...] in which magic and technology are combined.” Since, the genre has evolved considerably, dismissing, often, some of the elements of Pollak’s dieselpunk while augmenting it with further influences, notably retro futurism and Adventure Pulp.” (Nick Ottens m.fl. i <http://www.ottens.co.uk/gatehouse/Gazette%20-%201.pdf>; lesedato 08.04.13)

“Generally, dieselpunk can take inspiration from 1920s German Expressionist films, Film Noir, 1930s Pulp Magazines and Radio Dramas, Crime and wartime comics, period propaganda films and newsreels, wartime pinups, and other entertainment of the early 20th century. As this covers a broad spectrum, the precise sources of inspiration can vary greatly between dieselpunk works. Like Steam Punk, Dieselpunk is a genre dictated primarily by its aesthetics rather than by its thematic content. Both grime and glamour have their place in dieselpunk. [...] The term Dieselpunk was popularized by Lewis Pollak and Dan Ross in 2001 as the genre for their RPG *Children of the Sun*. Pollak stated that it was intended to be on the “darker, dirtier side of Steam Punk” and should be considered a “continuum between steampunk and Cyber Punk.” [...] Vastness is key. This was the age of the Zeppelin, the ocean liner, the flying-boat airliner, and the skyscraper. It also saw the first multinational corporations, large-scale social engineering, and mass political movements. World War I was still fresh in memory as the Great War, the most colossal conflict in the history of mankind. Man is dwarfed by his creations and things are subsumed into abstractions. Period technology encompasses everything found in Steam Punk, but internal combustion and electric power in combination with new materials (better alloys, plastics, etc) makes

machinery lighter, stronger, and more versatile. The airliner is the prime example of this, but cars, trucks, tractors, and diesel-powered electrical generators are even more important in reshaping the world. Armored vehicles and useable submarines are less common but still important innovations. Wireless radio leads to the rise of broadcasting as an information medium. Anachronistic super-advanced technology, often of the Awesome, but Impractical variety, such as Giant Flyer, Spider Tank, Disintegrator Ray might occur. Such technology might be secret super weapons of a villain, or Homemade Inventions by the hero or his friends.” (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DieselPunk>; lesedato 17.04.13)

“Although the dieselpunk aesthetic can overlap with Raygun Gothic, and though dieselpunk is known for featuring Tesla technology and Wunderwaffen-style super-weapons, dieselpunk typically does not include transistor-based technology, other electronics or atomic power. In fact, another Punk Punk genre, Atompunk, was coined to describe fiction in this mode. Atompunk (such as the Fallout series and the comic book Fear Agent) takes inspiration from 1950s-era aesthetics and fashions such as Googie architecture and Jetsons-style technology, which typically lie outside the bounds of dieselpunk. The analogue sci-fi of Metropolis and Things To Come are closer to the dieselpunk tradition as it stands. [...] Dieselpunk often focuses upon air travel and combat, including such ideas as literal “flying fortresses”, air pirates, dirigibles, early UFOs, hotshot flyboy pilots, etc. Fascination for military hardware, weaponry and uniforms of the early 20th century is also often in evidence and a great amount of dieselpunk media is concerned with war, especially the Second World War and fictional variations upon it. Owing to its pulp roots, dieselpunk is often very adventure-based, full of exotic locales such as Mysterious Antarctica, Shangri-La, Hollow Earth etc. Some Geographic Flexibility is to be expected.” (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DieselPunk>; lesedato 17.04.13)

“Dieselpunk fiction can encompass the supernatural as well. [...] The works of H.P. Lovecraft, tales of Nazi occult research, contemporary expeditions to 'mystical' places such as Egypt, and early research into relativity and quantum physics have greatly contributed to the occult mystique that informs Dieselpunk. This tends to contrast with the 19th-century Gothic themes and spiritualism that show up in Steam Punk. As Dieselpunk is a post-modern look at the past, it is not limited to the tropes and stereotypes that characterized fiction of the day – instead, it can use these tropes to comment upon the past and reinvent it. Dieselpunk (along with steampunk) can encompass a range of authorial voices and themes. Female characters in Dieselpunk tend to be strong, encompassing flappers to pin-up girls and much more, and can include Rosie the Riveter-type action heroines, glamorous femme fatales, costumed crusaders, archaeologist badasses, dragon ladies, tough-talking reporters and other types common to pulp fiction of the era.” (<http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/DieselPunk>; lesedato 17.04.13)

Den amerikanske regissøren Kerry Conrans film *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* (2004) “defined what we now know as the dieselpunk style. [...] the

movie brought a retrofuturistic vision of 1939 that had never been seen before. With obvious nods to the original period, *Sky Captain* always felt fresh without being derivative. It had high flying action, a cold war between mad scientists and a period setting that exemplified practically all of the tropes of modern dieselpunk.” (Tome Wilson i <http://www.ottens.co.uk/gatehouse/Gazette%20-%202022.pdf>; lesedato 26.03.13)

“Dieselpunk as a style is best described as contemporary art strongly influenced by the pop culture and technology of the 1920s through the 1940s. Instead of recreating the past, dieselpunks incorporate modern technology, punk rock attitudes and postmodern storytelling techniques in their work, making the past a starting point rather than a destination. [...] In 1981, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* mined the cliffhanger style of Republic Serials with the iconic characters of 1930s pulp adventure novels to create a feature length Hollywood blockbuster. Although toned down due to budgets, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas were still able to mix a lot of the core tropes of dieselpunk into the work [...]. It was the huge success of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* that successfully planted the seeds of high flying pulp adventure repeatedly harvested by dieselpunk and proto-dieselpunk artists ever since, most notably in the 1982 live action television show *Tales of the Gold Monkey* and that show’s animated successor, *Disney’s TaleSpin* (1990).” (<http://www.ottens.co.uk/gatehouse/Gazette%20-%202022.pdf>; lesedato 26.03.13)

“The genre of Dieselpunk consists of three components: Diesel Era/Decodence [dvs. Art Deco-perioden], Contemporary in Origin, and the importance of Punk. When taken together, these three components form the basis of the Dieselpunk genre. [...] The exact ending of the diesel era is in some dispute in the dieselpunk community. Depending on the source it ends either at the conclusion of World War II or continues until the early part of the 1950s with the advent of such cultural icons as the Golden Age of Television and the replacement of Big Band and Swing music with Rock and Roll in popularity. [...] To be considered ‘dieselpunk,’ the subject must be “contemporary in origin,” which covers the period of time after the early 1950s. Art, music, movies and other productions that originated during the period of the 1920s through 40s are not considered ‘dieselpunk’ but serve as source material for the genre of Dieselpunk. [...] The Meaning of “Punk”. There’s been much discussion in the Dieselpunk community about the use of the suffix “Punk.” Punk adds several elements to Dieselpunk. One, it’s what allows for twisting and mixing. The Punk component allows for alternative history, horror, science fiction and more. Two, the Punk in Dieselpunk also makes it very postmodern in that what’s Dieselpunk to one individual may not be Dieselpunk to another but both interpretations are equally valid. A third element is that the Punk suffix declares that the genre is counter-cultural by nature in that it presents an alternative to contemporary culture along with providing a critique of contemporary society.” (<http://dieselpunksencyclopedia.wordpress.com/origin-of-dieselpunk/>; lesedato 08.05.13)

“In 2011, at least three new novels were defined as “dieselpunk” by their authors. One, *Fistful of Reefer* by David Mark Brown, is “a dieselpunk, weird Western pulp w/goats, guns & the camaraderie of outcasts.” [...] During 2011, Larry Correia published two novels in the Grimnoir Series, *Hard Magic* and *Spellbound*. The author posted on Dieselpunks.org, “When I wrote it I’d not even heard the term “diesel punk” but it fits.” In Russia, Maria Chepurina published her novel *S.S.S.M.* (orig. “C.C.C.M.”, Самая Счастливая Страна Мира, World’s Happiest Country). It’s a retro sci-fi thriller based on utopic ideas of Tatlin and other Russian revolutionary idealists of 1920s. The setting relies on 1920s and early 1930s aesthetics, though the action is set in 1941. Another Russian author, Igor Nikolayev, published a novel titled *Iron Wind* (orig. “Железный ветер”). The action is set in 1950s’ parallel world full of giant dirigibles, floating fortresses and submarine battleships. There is no heavier-than-air aviation, and the “water world” is vulnerable to the invasion of properly equipped Nazi villains from our timeline. In Brazil, Editora Draco published a 380-page anthology titled *Dieselpunk – Arquivos confidenciais de uma bela época* (Dieselpunk – Confidential files from a belle époque). It includes nine short stories, each one presenting an alternative history focused on Brazil. [...] Another 2012 première is *The Troubleshooter (New Haven Blues)* by Bard Constantine. It’s set in a post-apocalyptic dieselpunk world packed with retrofuturistic artifacts and noir scenes mood. The setting is dystopian but not depressing, thanks to the lively and cynical narrator/main character, a hard-boiled private investigator Mick Trubble.” (<http://dieselpunksencyclopedia.wordpress.com/6-1-dieselpunk-fiction-and-literature/>; lesedato 25.04.13)

“Notable precursors to the dieselpunk genre encompass the very same themes and ideas expressed in steampunk – transposed into the 1930s. We find a tumultuous time in which society has not recovered entirely from the horrific experiences of the Great War, yet one in which the threat of another war seems ever present. It is also a time in which the dirtier and grittier aspects of an advanced technocratic society become apparent and accepted.” (Piecrafft 2009b)

På 1920- og 1930-tallet “people perceived a future that could at one time or another have been dominated by the totalitarian powers, specifically the Nazi regime – evoking concepts of the supernatural and Über-technology that was revolutionized by the whacky radicalism of engineers and scientists of the time. Such themes promoted in the independent feature *Iron Sky* – which alludes to what would have happened if the Nazis had escaped to the Moon – present the growing fascination with the emerging genre of dieselpunk [...] a type of alternative history science fiction [...] Terry Gilliam’s “Brazil” (1985): [...] We find airplanes or airships as the foremost modes of transportation; the sky in seemingly perpetual darkness from the smog of combustible vehicles; dirty diesel guzzling locomotives and the petroleum-producing factories dotted across the metropolis-complex. All these elements make up the definitive dieselpunk world.” (Piecrafft 2009b)

“[T]here is a melancholic atmosphere projected within the world, where the dark pillars of petroleum fumes and engine noises and vehicles no longer bring about

sentiments of joyous anxiety and wonder but one of conformity and pollution. *Casshern*, *The Mutant Chronicles* (2008) and *Delicatessen* (1991) each portray a world that harbors the mood of the previous decade. The angst and depravity still remains from the previous economic crisis and the futility of the last war still resonates upon the characters in this new world of wondrous mechanical and industrial prowess. Even with the splendor of the giant mechanical creations as gargantuan robots and skyscrapers and mega-structures, in *Casshern* there is that horrific reminder of the previous war that is demonstrated with the village scene where we find people living in poverty and dying from starvation – left over from the previous war to rot. Or in the case of *The Mutant Chronicles* the forgotten ancient, albeit alien machine that is unknowingly unleashed upon the world due to the ongoing wars between the global corporate powers – another reminder of the destructive effect of the machine-industrial complex. We find the haunting themes of technology and an unresolved past that bring about a much more jaded world that seems to be caught under the shadow of progression rather than brimming with hope and prosperity [...] *Casshern* and *The Mutant Chronicles* as well as *Delicatessen* provide their dieselpunk world with a hero who attempts to remedy the problems through their own means, even if it relies on their self-destruction — as is usually the case in all three films. The emphasis on famine and poverty emanating from the social collapse of the Depression and on wartorn urban slums or cities built up entirely of factories and industry are key to the look and feel of the landscape capitalized in all three films and are another important facet to the dieselpunk formula.” (Piecrafft 2009b)

“*Dark City* (1998), directed by Alex Proyas, is perhaps the epitome of the darker nature of dieselpunk. [...] We find the dark despondency and dystopian world [...] we find out later that this city is nothing more than a constructed environment controlled by strange, psychic alien beings known as The Strangers who have saved the remaining survivors of a post-nuclear Earth and now regulate them on a mechanized world formed of gears and combustible engines that work to fabricate the illusion of the world prior to the cataclysm. The central character once again is the misaligned antihero, John Murdoch, who awakens alone in a hotel to find that he has lost his memory and is wanted for a series of brutal and bizarre murders. While trying to piece together his past, he stumbles upon a fiendish underworld controlled by The Strangers who possess the ability to put people to sleep and alter the city and its inhabitants. Murdoch seeks a way to stop these beings and expose the truth before they capture him and before they can once again assimilate him back into the ordered society. The city is nothing more than an advanced computer perpetuated by the energy of the people imprisoned within it. The Strangers seek out Murdoch because of the extraordinary powers he manifests while he slowly recollects the memories of his original past. John decides to find out what is happening in the city; he questions the everlasting night and the apparent inability to leave the city. These are all elements of an exaggerated noir-esque environment. The dark, brooding atmosphere, smoky skies and oil-slicked streets are obvious dieselpunk characteristics and like film noir and other pulp material that has

inspired the genre, we find that all the action takes place in one setting which is cleverly manifested as the Dark City itself. The individual protagonist never seems to escape the sprawl of the urban metropolis or the world in which the events that pave the way for the changing future. Perhaps this is the pessimistic perspective by which any punk genre defines itself within the subject material. The characters are locked in a continuous time period, marked by the advances in technology that inspire all aspects of civilization, from architecture to fashion to music, yet they can never release themselves from that ever changing fate of the future.” (Piecrafft 2009b)

“Perhaps it is best to accept that the “punk” suffix added to these literary genres developed not out of the same sense as the punk musical scene, but out of the actual definition of the term. Punk referred to a label given to antagonize anyone who was seen as rebellious or anti-establishment; mostly designated to the younger generation, basically one who would go against the grain of society. This “punk” attitude was further enhanced with cyberpunk in an all too bleak view of the 1980s drowned in the Digital Age and mass consumerism, but it was later carried into the extraordinary adventures and inventions found in a curious age before the turn-of-the-century. An age that reveled in the world of steampunk, with high hopes about industry and progress, bringing about exciting technology but also social change. Thus the daring adventurers and anti-social inventors of this time could be seen as the “punks” of their period, rejecting the status quo of the time to challenge and seek their true destinies. We observe that this was further enhanced by the inclusion of the urban, gritty and raw characters found in the 1930s, demonstrated through film noir and pulp literature. [...] Dieselpunk combines the antihero entity that is modified within steampunk’s “Great White Colonial Explorer” (i.e., Allan Quatermain) archetype or “Daring Adventurer” (i.e., Doc Savage) – k which were originally derived from cyberpunk heroes – back to the “Misaligned Urban Detective” (Sam Spade), “Military Hero” (Biggles), “Adventurer” (Indiana Jones) or “Outcast” (Mad Max), who possess a stronger hold on moral values and works toward the ultimate good of his people, *even* though he is plagued by the darkened atmosphere of his time. There is also a dash of alternate history [...] Therefore the understanding of the term dieselpunk refers to a form of literary science fiction that takes place during a timespan in which petroleum fuels machines while the atomic and combustibles are at its high point; just as steam locomotives and steam- and gas engineered machines are quintessential to steampunk. It is an ambiguous and yet general aspect of the neologism that comprises the “punk” attitude or element of the strange, the “otherness” in juxtaposition to the type of society or world in which the adventure and stories take place.” (Piecrafft 2009b)

I litteratur og andre kunstarter finnes det en “ ‘punk’ attitude: a refusal to accept the world as presented, with a correlating desire to reshape it, and ultimately action to bring those envisioned changes to reality. Individuals with their independent ways and views, with a more encompassing or outsider attitude, and with a desire for something at least different if not more fulfilling, see how their own status quo is

lacking or oppressive and seeks to make a change for themselves in their own lives for their own happiness. Punks test the limits of societal acceptability, confront conformity and complacency, and create jarringly unexpected new forms of expression.” (Kevin Steil i <http://airshipambassador.wordpress.com/2010/04/18/steampunk-is-%E2%80%A6-reaction-rebellion-resolution/>; lesedato 16.04.13)

“If I play with Nazi (or general totalitarian) aesthetics, does that make me a sympathizer? [...] What could motivate a nonsympathizer to adopt the style? The answer to the first question is quite obviously “No.” [...] The uniforms from which dieselpunk takes its inspiration look great and have an aura of power bordering on the intimidating. Let me elaborate: Totalitarian regimes in general and Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union in particular, got one thing right: Branding. Everything those two regimes put out to represent them, such as propaganda, uniforms and architecture was and still is memorable, powerful and stylish in an intimidating way. SS and Waffen-SS uniforms in particular have, for lack of a term that is more to the point, badass written all over them. The branding effect still lasts. It is recognizable even sixty and soon seventy years after the national socialist regime in Germany collapsed. A modern example for the still noticeable effect of this branding is the German rock and metal band Rammstein. If you ever had the pleasure of attending one of their concerts in the late 1990s, you could not help but realize they were playing with Nazi aesthetics as Hitler’s “court photographer” Leni Riefenstahl depicted them. This leads me to answer the second question: There is a certain dark fascination that radiates from totalitarian design and styles that people are attracted to. It is something that spells power and if you partake in it or use part of it, such as uniforms and designs, you, too, can radiate this power. So to answer why nonsympathizers dress up in a style that is reminiscent of Nazi Germany is that those uniforms and the decorum derived from it look darkly powerful and people like wearing it.” (Marcus Rauchfuss i <http://www.ottens.co.uk/gatehouse/Gazette%20-%2022.pdf>; lesedato 26.03.13)

Dieselpunk er “a subculture and style that combines the *zeitgeist* of the 1920s through 40s with postmodern sensibilities from a countercultural viewpoint. [...] The rise of Modernity as a wide scale cultural element dominated this *zeitgeist*. The word ‘decodence’ (a portmanteau of ‘deco’ and ‘decadence’) describes the general feeling of the *zeitgeist* of that era found within dieselpunk. The -punk suffix in dieselpunk is a postmodern phenomenon with an emphasis on the poststructuralist aspect that, rather than a metanarrative, involves a first-person narrative. The individual reconstructs or reimagines the source material and consciously intends to blend this inspiration with a contemporary idea or style. In addition, the -punk suffix reflects a countercultural attitude of dissatisfaction with contemporary society and displays that dissatisfaction in the way the person celebrates dieselpunk individually and within the community. Dieselpunk by its nature therefore involves a dialectical tension between the diesel- prefix and the -punk suffix. The diesel- prefix provides a set of parameters and the element of Modernity while the -punk suffix infuses it with a postmodern nature of the individual narrative resulting in a

subclass of genre-punk that is highly varied in its various manifestations. [...] after all, why we like these genres: they give us a past or a future or a combination of both that promises us something our present times lack – adventure, wonder, optimism about the future.” (<http://www.ottens.co.uk/gatehouse/2013/10/whats-in-a-name/>; lesedato 23.04.16)

Alle artiklene og litteraturlista til hele leksikonet er tilgjengelig på <https://www.litteraturogmedieleksikon.no>