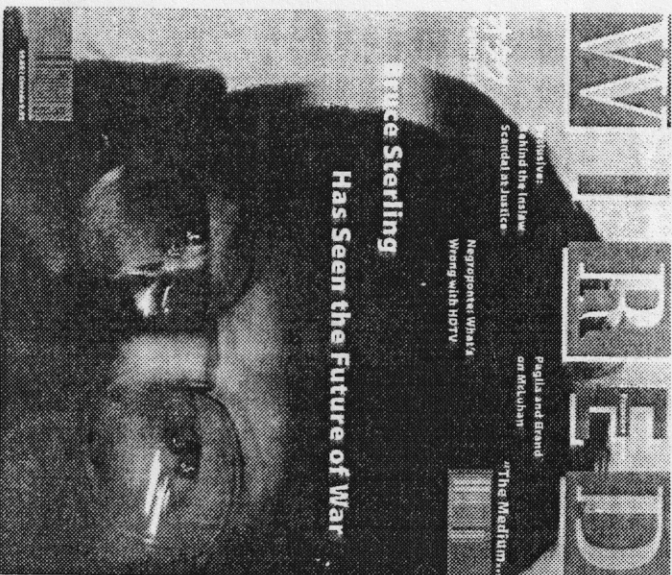


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Keith Seward and Eric Swenson on *Wired*



Wired, 1993, cover of the magazine's premier issue.

Is this what cyberpunks would look like if they took off their mirror shades? Would they have four eyes, like Bruce Sterling on the cover of *Wired*? The polycular gaze of the cyberpunk author and electronic freedom-fighter fixes us with an intensity unmatched by anyone save, perhaps, the Marquisse Casati in Man Ray's famous photograph. But this is not surrealism. It is not concerned with dreams, hypnosis, or other psychic weirdnesses, but with a vision of a consensus reality accelerated by technology. The correct prefix is not "sur" but "hyper," or maybe "cyber." Bruce Sterling Has Seen the Future of War," a headline proclaims. The premier issue of *Wired* promises to tell us whether we're really building a better tomorrow. Does it deliver? "There are a lot of magazines about technology," declares Louis Rossetto, in an editorial that seems to cross a Pepsi commercial and the Discovery channel, "*Wired* is not one of them. *Wired* is about the most powerful people

on the planet today—the Digital Generation." Apparently the Digital Generation is a little more grown-up than the readers of *Mondo 2000*, hitherto the vox *cyberpopuli*. There are no spreads on rock stars or exhortations to snort vasopressin in the pages of *Wired*, which compares itself much more seriously—though it has a tendency toward a gushing enthusiasm that sometimes starts to sound silly, as in a sort of "what's hot, what's not" list (e.g., *Tred*: Cindy Crawford, Chaos Theory, Beaudrillard [sic]; *Wired*: Jane March, Complexity Theory, Marshall McLuhan).

Wired is at its best when the hype clears and information is left standing in its wake. The various news departments are excellent (did you know that, in Germany, Phillip Morris packs buxom babes off to bars totting Powerbooks loaded with interactive cigarette advertisements? Or that the first Fiber Distributed Data Interface will be installed on commercial airliners in 1995, allowing passengers to watch pay-per-view movies, play video games, and transmit faxes, all from their seats?). Though there are a few *Tred* articles about things even the *New York Times* has gotten to already (morphing, the sexual potential of cyberspace, etc.), by and large there is much to read here. Sterling's superb article on the

military uses of virtual reality should help to bring the inflated rhetoric of this technology down to earth. Richard L. Fricke's investigation of the Inslaw affair (in which the Department of Justice allegedly abetted "the willful destruction of a company, the plundering of its software, the illegal resale of that software to further foreign policy objectives, and the overt obstruction of justice") sets the head spinning.* Karl Taro Greenfeld's profile of "the incredibly strange mutant creatures who rule the universe of alienated Japanese zombie computer nerds," or *Oraku*, for short, is funny but for the fact that it depicts a bunch of alienated Asian youths who say things like "I guess I'm frightened of sex. . . . If it were possible to have sex with objects, then that would be a different matter."

McLuhan crops up often in *Wired*, and is listed on the masthead as its "Patron Saint." The entire magazine does indeed have a McLuhanesque feel, whether in its design or in its commitment to assessing electronic technology's social impact. "Intrigued" by Camille Paglia's "intellectual renaissance" to McLuhan, *Wired* even sought her out for an interview, wherein she treats us to a self-analysis of her own gray matter ("I mean, half my brain is the traditional Apollonian

logo-centric side which was trained by the rigorous public schools of that period, but the other half is completely an electrified brain"). Paglia is far too tiresome to be bothered with, but we are perplexed by a subtle syllogism: If McLuhan is the magazine's departed patron saint, and if Paglia is a latter-day McLuhan, then is Paglia the magazine's *living* patron saint? Whether or no, Paglia's appearance in the premier issue lights up a problem with *Wired*—the same problem one senses in Clinton/Gore having used "Don't Stop (Thinkin' about Tomorrow)" as their campaign standard. Though it's full of cheery optimism, this is not just a *Tred* song but literally an old one: It promises a future, but you actually turn away from the future in the very act of letting the tune spill out of your lips. Likewise does Paglia claim to be shockingly progressive while spouting the same old names from the '60s—In this interview alone, McLuhan, Norman O. Brown, Leslie Fiedler, and Allen Ginsberg. McLuhan himself used to say that we march backward into the future. We hope the editors of *Wired* understand their patron saint's words as a diagnosis, not a destiny. □

Keith Seward contributes regularly to *Artforum*. He and Eric Swenson are currently producing a multimedia journal called *RAW*.