

The Style that Defines Cyberpunk

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A movement is an organized action by people working toward a goal. A literary movement may be based on the goals of writing about a particular subject or writing about many subjects while using the same type of style or language. The latter is the classification of literary movements under which cyberpunk falls. Cyberpunk is a literary movement in which the authors are working toward the goal of writing fiction that focuses on the actual or projected technological nature of society and that utilizes sexual imagery as a representation of the importance of sex in our culture. The cyberpunk authors use the technology and sex to add a realistic feel to their prose.

The elements that make up the technological nature of our society include nuclear science, fusion of organic and inorganic matter, computers, artificial organs, genetic engineering, the internet and virtual reality. The brief list consists of some of the many technological advances in our society and in the futuristic societies created by cyberpunk writers.

The subject of sex is used in cyberpunk prose because it is so pervasive in society. Sex is everywhere. The president of the US pointed out the bad taste of the Calvin Klein commercials which contained children in sequences where a photographer asks them to do perform certain poses. One gets an ugly feeling that uncle perv is asking them to do these poses and somehow enjoys it. Sex is so pervasive that it is present in advertising, film and television. The cyberpunk authors create futuristic societies that contains sex in an amount equivalent to present day society to add a realistic feel to their view of the future. The use of technology and sex are evident in the following story.

The Gernsback Continuum by William Gibson contains many examples of the prose that utilizes technological and sexual language. Gibson uses the following sentences to poke fun at 1930s american futuristic ideal when he refers to pollution that present-day America is plagued with, "The Thirties dreamed white marble and slipstream chrome, immortal crystal and burnished bronze, but the rockets on the covers of the Gernsback pulps had fallen on London in the dead of night, screaming. After the war, everyone had a car-no wings for it-and the promised superhighway to drive it down, so that the sky itself darkened, and the fumes ate the marble and pitted the miracle crystal".

The Gernsback Continuum is a literary work in which the vices, follies, etc, of Hugo Gernsback's vision of what America would be is ridiculed. Gibson uses the current level of advancement in technology to paint a bleak picture of the actual nature of society in the story. The image is a sharp contrast from the grandiose visions Hugo Gernsback. The American ideal proposed by Hugo Gernsback in his science magazines predicted the invention of great new products that would make the world a better place to live.

Gibson tries to demonstrate what the advances in society have done to present-day society. Gibson refers to the today's pollution problem in many of America's big cities in his story as a way to demonstrate some of the implications of such powerful knowledge. The advances in our technological society allow us to create automobiles that pollute the environment and machines that can destroy the natural terrain to make way for a superhighway. The next example is another illustration of the use of the current level of technology to describe a future society.

Gibson writes about the advances in technology to describe a dream in *The Gernsback Continuum*. He uses the technological language to describe the futuristic city of Tucson in the photographer's dream. "The air was thick with ships : giant-wing liners, little darting silver things (sometimes one of the quicksilver shapes from the sky bridges rose gracefully into the air flew up to join the dance), mile-long blimps, hovering dragonfly things that were gyrocopters". References to words like giant-wing liners and mile-long blimps are illustrations of Gibson's use of current levels of technology to describe the future. Giant-wing liners were described earlier in the story as flying boomerangs. A contemporary military aircraft called the B-2 bomber is designed like a flying boomerang. The large blimps of the 1940s and the B-2 bombers are examples of the technology used in the story to project the technological nature of society.

Gibson also uses the subject of sex in *The Gernsback Continuum* to add humanity in the story. In one instance, the character named Merv Kihn is advising the photographer to "watch lots of television, particularly game shows and soaps. Go to porn movies. Ever see Nazi Love Motel ? They've got it on cable here. Really awful. Just what you need". The reference to porn movies and the Nazi Love Motel are examples of the sexual language in the story. The pornographic movies and magazines are pervasive in our society. Adding contemporary sexual imagery to the story gives the reader the sense of realism because these images are present in our society.

Snake Eyes by Tom Maddox is another example of a cyberpunk story in which the author utilizes sexual imagery to add actuality to the story while projecting the technological nature of society. An example of the preceding statement is given in the following quote. "The A-230 flew on the deadly edge of instability, every control surface monitored by its own bank of microcomputers, all hooked into the snakebrain flight and fire assistant with the twin black miloprene cables running on either side of his esophagus-getting off, oh yes, when the cables snapped home, and the airframe resonated through his nerves, his body singing with that identity, that power". This example is an illustration of the technological language used by Maddox in the story. The technology that is being referred to is the fusion of inorganic matter with organic matter. The snakebrain flight and fire assistant is the inorganic matter that is fused with George's brain, the organic matter. The idea of fusion of organic matter with inorganic matter is projected by Maddox in our future society. As important as technology is to our society, Maddox also includes sex in the story to bring us back down to humanity.

Maddox refers to an orgasm that the character experiences when the cables are snapped into the outlets underneath his chin in the preceding quote. Maddox uses the idea of an orgasm experienced through a machine to complete the image of the fusion of the A-230 with George. What better raw aspect of humanity to connect to than the sex drive. Sex and the implications of our current level of technology is the focus of the next example of cyberpunk.

Freezone by John Shirley, is science fiction that focuses on projected consequences of our current level of technology and the potential openness of sex in our society. The story contains several examples of technological aspects of society. In the beginning of the story, the United States is described as going into a recession because some terrorists explode an H-bomb. The H-bomb explodes in space and creates an electromagnetic pulse which destroys 93 percent of the memory of the banks in America. This quote is a reflection of the author's assessment of our current level of dependence upon technology. An example from recent history was the crash in AT&T's phone lines. The phone lines were down for several hours and business for a lot of corporations ceased to exist for some time. Shirley uses today's common technology to add realism to the predictions.

Shirley's prose is full of sexual language and sexual episodes that reflects the pervasiveness of sex in our culture. A blatant example from the story concerns the stores in freezone called the tingler galleries. A typical booth in a gallery is described in the story, "a sodden red light hummed in each booth; the light snagged you, a

wavelength calculated to produce sexual curiosity. In each 'privacy booth' was a screen and a tingler. The tingler looked like a twentieth-century vacuum cleaner hose with an oversized salt-shaker top on one end. You watched the pictures, listened to the sounds, and ran the tingler over your erogenous zones; the tingler stimulated the appropriate nerve ends with a subcutaneously penetrative electric field, very precisely attenuated". He uses sexual imagery in their story to reflect what he thinks a future society will be like with regard to the role of sex. The example is an illustration of how Shirley combines sex with technology to project the technological nature of society. Like other cyberpunk authors, Shirley uses his prose to predict what effect technology will have on our future and what the role of sex will be in that future.

The uniqueness of cyberpunk may be of question to the reader because many contemporary authors write about sex and technology, but those authors do not predict the consequences of technology. Cyberpunk writers use the current level of technology to consider the possible consequences of their use. People may disagree with the claim that all cyberpunk writers have the goal of writing science fiction about the technological and sexual aspects of society, and the author acknowledges that his knowledge of the cyberpunk movement is limited. However, given the preponderance of sexual and technological material in the stories read, it may be construed that, on the whole, prose in the cyberpunk genre possess these elements.