Cyberpunk Definitional Paper

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In the late 1970's and early '80's and new type of writing style came about that relied on many of the traditional criteria to be called science fiction, but had a certain something else that had many people agreeing that it was not just science fiction. This new style of writing was so different and so many people started writing in this style that the general public decided that it was time this genre of writing deserved a label : cyberpunk. Cyberpunk is not an easy group of writing to define on paper, but it is easy to spot when one is reading it. The cyberpunk writing movement started out with many short stories then became recognizable to the masses with probably the movements most successful novel, entitled *Neuromancer*. William Gibson's novel was the first major work to get recognized from this category, it seemed to set the precedence of what cyberpunk included, and what a piece of writing needed to have to get labeled cyberpunk. Cyberpunk does not define the works that are in it, rather, the works define what cyberpunk consists of.

Since William Gibson's *Neuromancer* was one of the first to be recognized as cyberpunk, the genre can be easily defined by the aspects set forth in his novel. *Neuromancer* was clearly sci-fi, but it included many points that typical sci-fi had never dealt with : this is what cyberpunk can be defined by. Bruce sterling said in the preface to his anthology *Mirrorshades* "it's possible to make broad statements about cyberpunk and to establish its identifying traits", and all of them are exemplified in *Neuromancer*.

One of the most distinctive features of cyberpunk is the technological aspect. Traditional science fiction dealt with things that were possible, but not probable. Cyberpunk not only deals possible, not just the probable, but technology that man already has. This is not to say that cyberpunks do not have there fair share of far flung imaginative human interface hookups and so forth, but they are talking about technology that if it were to be developed, it would be within the writers life time or so. The other difference in the technology that is described in cyberpunk is how it is used. Almost every person in the stories has access to the technology. More importantly, the technology involved normally allows for extreme human inter-action with it. The writer will make computers and humans connect, and allow the computer to alter the mind, human social behaviors, and/or society itself. Cyberpunk futures make computers not only become a part of everyday life, but a integral element for survival and prosperity. This aspect is the main plot in Gibson's novel. His main character, Case, needs to find a way to reverse the damage in a chip in his head for him to do the type of work he wanted to do. Before cyberpunk, humans had control over their technology, and it was a separate entity, but now the distinction over how much a person is human and how much of them are machine is not so clear. Now humans have lost the ability to control their technology.

Another important feature of cyberpunk is the integration of everyday events and items that affect people the most. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson allows Case to go in to a bar and have a beer. This may not be an overly exciting event, one that many people do every day, but the type of event that cyberpunks write about. People have been going into bars for centuries, and will probably do so for many years into the future, cyberpunks allow this to happen. Other writers will incorporate music as a main motif in their story. Almost everybody hears some sort of music everyday, it is a common event that these writers accentuate to make the stories seem more real. Other forms of science fiction incorporate these ideas, but make them seem that they are not a part of everyday life. Take *Star Trek*, for instance. This show, both the new one and the old one, are what most people view as a typical science fiction story line. Hardly ever in these shows do they do leisurely things, such as listen to music,

without it being a big deal. In real life, listening to music is one of the most common events, cyberpunk also views it as a common event.

Probably the most significant difference between cyberpunk and science fiction is the view the writers take. Almost all of the "traditional" science fiction had an extroverted writing style. Those writers has the world met by other phenomena, such as men going out and finding aliens or having the aliens come and invade the earth. Cyberpunk writers are much more introverted. They write from the point of view that the world creates the main conflict in the story, not that the world encounters the conflict. Bruce Sterling describes "cyberpunk work is marked by its visionary intensity". Cyberpunks manifest their work to describe what the world will become, not what the world will encounter. Gibson's novel set forth this idea having the plot center on the earth, and no where else. Gibson vividly depicts the earth and alludes to how man made it this way, with no outside help.

On a whole, most styles of writing are hard to define because there is no exact definition of what the style is, the writing always defines the genre. One can only group works with certain similarities to make classifications easier. Cyberpunk is relatively easy to group, but it is even harder to define since it is considered to be within a the larger group of science fiction. Cyberpunk has almost become a way out for critics to define these writers. These writers are science fiction, but since they do not always deal with the values and ideas brought forth by the "traditional" science fiction writers, the critic will pass it off as being cyberpunk. While the label cyberpunk will take these works, the label itself grows and changes with every work that is added, making cyberpunk a broader, more open category and harder to define. Cyberpunk does however hold on to its original values that include what can be considered a human factor to set itself apart from "traditional" science fiction.