

# Eighties Cyberpunk

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In the early 1980's, cyberpunk was used as a label to describe a new form of science fiction written by a group of five writers, which challenged the traditional genres associated with science fiction (Shiner, 7). SF used highly imaginative ideas to project scientific phenomenas, resulting in dreamy, stylized stories of space colonies and flying space crafts. This new science fiction was different, because it incorporated present global, social and technological situations to help induce the future of the world. It generated new outcomes for the future's high technological, society and global environment that would help categorize it into a specific form of writing known as cyberpunk.

William Gibson, one of the five writers associated with the cyberpunk genre, is credited by critics and peers for typifying the cyberpunk writing form in his popular novel *Neuromancer*. Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker, John Shirley and Lewis Shiner, the other four writers who helped launch the movement, agree that Gibson's *Neuromancer* influenced the categorization of the new science fiction as cyberpunk. Therefore, Gibson's novel can be used as a reliable source for defining the cyberpunk genre.

With this in mind, we can analyze the high-technology used in *Neuromancer* and its importance to the cyberpunk form of writing. Gibson creates an advanced technological machine called Flatline's construct, which is a "hardwired ROM cassette replicating a dead man's skills, obsessions, knee jerk responses" (Gibson, 20). This futuristic device that brings back human personalities from the dead, can be viewed as a result of the present fascination with bringing dead people back to life. This fascination is evident in hospital emergency rooms and in game boards like the Ouija board. Both examples are similar the use of the Flatline's construct, in the sense that all three bring life back to the dead. This incorporation of high-technology with society's present interests in mind, is a frequent form recognizable in *Neuromancer* and in the cyberpunk fiction of Sterling, Rucker, Shirley and Lewis.

A common element of genuine cyberpunk writing found in *Neuromancer*, is Gibson's depiction of the futuristic society and the people who live in it. Once again, Gibson uses the present issues of government and nuclear tension to predict society's future. In *Neuromancer*, this results in a world ruined by nuclear war. However, the people living in the society continue to survive in the world for personal benefit, or just for the sake of living. Gibson shows an example of this with his characters in *Neuromancer*. Gibson places his main character, Case, in a surrounding where the atmosphere has deteriorated, and society has mutated into black markets involved in nerve-splicing, and microbionics (19). No matter how grim the outlook, Case still finds the need to survive in order to find a cure for his ruined nervous system, which was destroyed by a wartime mycotoxin. Other characters like Ratz, the bar tender, with the prosthetic pink plastic arm, is an example of the other members in society that live just for the reason of being alive. Cyberpunk's society often revolves on the people who have survived their eroded surroundings that have been caused by nuclear or governmental misuse.

Another common aspect of Gibson's *Neuromancer*, which can also be found in the written work of Sterling, Rucker, Shiner and Lewis is their use of the deteriorated global environment to help establish and describe the society and technology in their futuristic worlds. In the beginning of *Neuromancer*, Case's first thought is, "the sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" (Gibson, 17). This opening sentence sets up the idea that the world has been through a drastic global change. This common use of the description of the environment can be connected to the present depletion of the ozone layer, or pollution and other certain

environmental issues faced today. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson uses this information in his writing and predicts a futuristic environment with quartz-halogen floods lighting up the docks, and sea gulls flying above shoals of white styro foam in Tokyo, (19). Using the negligence of present global issues to predict the outcome of futuristic environments in cyberpunk, helps establish the form of the society associated with cyberpunk. This technique is evident in Gibson's *Neuromancer*, and in any other genuine cyberpunk fiction.

With all this in mind, Eighties Cyberpunk can then be categorized by these three basic elements found in *Neuromancer*, because of Gibson's credentials for leading and establishing the cyberpunk movement with this specific novel. Thus, the high-technology, ruined societies, and tarnished global environment which helped shape the future depicted in *Neuromaner*, became associated with the cyberpunk fiction writer.

As a result, cyberpunk is defined by similar genres found in Gibson's *Neuromancer*, and in the writing of the other four cyberpunk writers : Sterling, Rucker, Shirley and Lewis. They were the first writers to be categorized as cyberpunk, so their writing style can be considered as genuine cyberpunk science fiction. Of course, there are some writers, other than these these five, that can be categorized under cyberpunk because their stories contain the form established by these writers. However, there are other science fiction writers who choose to stray away from this form and create new styles of SF. Their work can not be labeled as cyberpunk because it has been stripped of the elements established in the early 1980's, by the five writers who first generated this new genre of science fiction known as 80's cyberpunk.