

Blade Running to Cyberpunk

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Labels are a product of too many ideas that describes a field. Cyberpunk fiction is a genre that has only recently received its due respect as an art form. This label is the cause of great controversy when it comes to actually defining cyberpunk. To any definition, there are arguments to its validity and consistency, but there are some generally accepted traits of Cyberpunk. Cyberpunk is a reflection of the pop-culture of the eighties, an extension of Science Fiction that entangles hard and soft technology, and its stories contain realism.

The eighties began the era of the Cyberpunk movement. Cyberpunk's early works reflected raw, young ideas of people who "refused the limits offered them by mere custom and habit" (Sterling). Across the world, technology was interfacing with the general population. The underground of New York, Tokyo, and London was writhing with desire for release. Cyberpunk was an answer to that. It integrated the rock videos, synthesized music, and new technology of the decade, put it in context with the current social scene and then fast-forwarded it. The writers tended to have disregard and even disrespect for traditional publishing. In the nineties, the edge of the movement has worn off with the acquisition of maturity and success. "Good" Cyberpunk retains most of those qualities today, with minor adjustments in style, such as having finer narrative, superior character development, and more insightful futurism. The integration of technology and narration has always been present.

Uneducated readers may see Cyberpunk as the same thing as Science Fiction. Any Cyberpunk would beg to differ. Though Cyberpunk is derived from Science Fiction, it is unique. Unlike Science Fiction, which uses hard or soft technology and style, Cyberpunk usually meshes both elements together. Hard SF incorporates a lot of math and technical science. Soft SF generally deals with newer sciences such as psychology or sociology. Cyberpunk tries to use both to compliment each other, having high technology as well as intricate emotions in the same story.

The third element of Cyberpunk is that unlike much Science Fiction, it deals greatly with realism. This realism can be described as extrapolative. Cyberpunk is typically written from a familiar point of view, such as modern day or it's predicted future. Questions like "what would happen ten years from now..." or "what will Japan be like in twenty-five years..." can be used to determine a semi-realistic setting of a story. Cyberpunk is not about young, rich kids jetting off to Mars in their BMW spaceship to hang out with aliens. Customary, the place and time of a Cyberpunk story is not too far away from today's world. One of the many reasons that Cyberpunk has gained so much popularity is that Generation X has actually grown up in a truly cyberpunk world. Not only are the X-ers comfortable with the intricate technology that has developed in the eighties and nineties, they are dependent upon it. Although this genre resists conventional boundaries found in other fiction, it is not so fantastic that it could never happen.

Though there has not been a standard definition of Cyberpunk set, these traits can be found in almost all Cyberpunk fiction. One example of a work that fits into the genre is the film *Blade Runner*. It was adapted from a novel entitled *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep ?* by Philip K. Dick. It is generally agreed upon that the film and the novel are drastically different in content and interpretation. The book was decidedly Science Fiction. However, when it was made into a screenplay, the changes in characters, setting and details, its place in the Cyberpunk files was saved. *Blade Runner* can be considered a work of Cyberpunk because it includes all the factors previously articulated.

The imagery presented in the film is what gives it the pop-culture element as opposed to the actual content. This is hardly surprising as it was filmed in 1982; the beginning of the Cyberpunk movement. The freshness and the roughness of the film emphasizes that it is a product of Cyberpunk. The music veiling the background of L.A. is largely a synthesized score. Decker, the protagonist, is in a night club where this type of music played, or made, between "performing acts". The club type attire of the eighties is also worn by the posh people, and most of the Replicates (the antagonists).

The second reason *Blade Runner* can be considered Cyberpunk is that it brings hard and soft technology together with finesse. The scientific technology is very obvious in the film with the Replicants, flying cars, mechanical animals, etc... The softer side is more subtle. The turing test given to determine if one is a Replicant could be considered one item in this category. An item that combines both elements would be the androids themselves. Here there is an ultimate combination between the best of man and machine. The Replicant is a precise mechanical object, yet it has feelings and uses cognitive thinking skills. Rachel, the Replicant Decker falls for, thinks she is a human until Decker performs his test on her and proves otherwise. She is genuinely crushed when she learns that her life and memories are lies.

Realism is evident in *Blade Runner*, which demonstrates the final reason why it falls into the Cyberpunk category. It is entirely possible that a war could slowly destroy civilization as we know it. The cause of the war in the film is not detrimental to the plot. Only the facts that animals and children have become scarce on Earth, and the change in climate resulting from the war are important (the children are assumed to be rare, because they appear in only one scene -- outside the dead toy-maker/engineer's home). The story can also be considered realistic to a point because some of the technology in it has been developed and is in use today. Videophones and the voice-operated computers are two conspicuous examples in a society not too far into the future. When the film was made thirteen years ago, Cyberpunk was not visible to most of the literary public. Some of those fantastic components in *Blade Runner* are realistic in modern day.

So many opinions exist about what is and isn't Cyberpunk Fiction. Three elements have been (generally) agreed upon to be traits of the genre. They include reflections of the pop-culture of the eighties, combining of hard and soft technology, and an element of realism. Cyberpunk is more than an extension of Science Fiction, it is a literary movement that is growing and maturing. Though it has lost some of its young rawness, Cyberpunk remains a saucy defiance to the mainstream.