

Cyberpunk Fashion: Unveiling Gender Dynamics and Cinematic Narration Through Film Analysis

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Abstract: Amidst the currents of globalization and technological advancement, the fashion sector is undergoing swift growth, accompanied by heightened cross-cultural interactions. This study delves into this realm through the lens of three thoughtfully chosen films that spotlight cyberpunk fashion. These films offer perceptive viewpoints into the intricate interplay among fashion, gender, and cinematic storytelling. By deconstructing the transformative impact of cyberpunk fashion, this research accentuates its function in molding societal perceptions of gender roles. It extends invaluable insights into the dynamic fusion of fashion, gender dynamics, and the craft of visual narration. The exploration of cyberpunk fashion facilitates a deeper comprehension of the fashion industry's evolution. It serves as a wellspring of creativity for designers and brands, fostering innovation. Concurrently, it steers consumers toward a more judicious consumption and appreciation of diverse aesthetic values across eras within their pursuit of fashion. This investigation enhances scholarly exploration and furnishes a more all-encompassing grasp of the subject matter.

Keywords: cyberpunk fashion, punk fashion, gender consciousness

1. Introduction

Fashion serves as both a crystallization of human material civilization and an embodiment of spiritual culture. Within clothing lies a fusion of life and art, culture and creation, production and aesthetics. Various types of attire encapsulate the profound ideological connotations inherent in clothing culture.

In recent years, the term “Cyberpunk” has gained significant traction as a cultural and design element across various domains, including film, television, fine arts, ACG (Animation, Comics, and Games), and fashion, both domestically and internationally. This emerging trend has piqued the interest and admiration of an increasingly growing audience. Delving beyond its surface appeal, Cyberpunk fashion bears profound research significance and cultural value.

While existing literature has extensively examined the nexus between gender and clothing, the majority of these discussions revolve around sexism and the evolutionary trajectory of female attire. However, a notable research gap exists in the exploration of the correlation between clothing style evolution and gender construction. This research seeks to bridge this gap by scrutinizing how Cyberpunk fashion communicates gender dynamics across different temporal contexts, primarily through its portrayal in films.

Through a comprehensive analysis of three carefully selected films showcasing Cyberpunk fashion, this study aims to unravel the nuanced evolution of gender representation and expression. Employing a comparative approach encompassing visual aesthetics, costume design, and narrative elements, the investigation endeavors to illuminate the multifaceted impact of Cyberpunk fashion on both reinforcing and challenging traditional gender norms throughout its historical development.

Ultimately, this research aspires to provide insightful perspectives into the intricate interplay between fashion, gender, and cinematic storytelling. By dissecting the transformative influence of Cyberpunk fashion, the study underscores its role in shaping and reshaping societal perceptions of gender roles, offering valuable insights into the dynamic fusion of fashion, gender dynamics, and the art of visual narrative.

2. Key Definitions: From Punk to Cyberpunk

2.1. Origin of Punk

Born in the 1960s, Punk emerged initially in New York as the moniker for a rock band before disseminating to other locales, culminating in the establishment of the punk movement and culture. This emergence can be attributed to a profound economic crisis and a prevailing sense of societal pessimism. At its core, punk culture revolves around themes of rebellion and the rejection of tradition, often manifesting through provocative actions and vehement rhetoric.

Punkers directed their ire towards various facets of society, channeling their sentiments into cathartic outlets like music and attire. Within the realm of music, punk bands channeled their creative energy into expressions of ideological liberation and staunch anti-traditional sentiments. This was paralleled in their clothing choices, characterized by tattered jeans, inexpensive leather garments, distinctive hairstyles, and bold makeup. These distinctive fashion choices have since become emblematic of the classic punk style.

Over time, these acts of defiance and societal criticism coalesced into a burgeoning subculture, diverging sharply from the mainstream. Today, punk is not the punk it used to be. Although the bleak time has been covered up by today's gorgeous elements. Pop punk, rock punk, heavy metal punk, gothic punk, rap punk, punk has been blended into all the elements. However, there is no denying that the supreme creed of "speaking your own words in your own voice" has baptized every punk lover. This subculture's evolution, sparked by its confrontational ethos, served to further accentuate its discordant relationship with the prevailing societal norms.

2.2. From Original Punk to Cyberpunk

Punk, born in the 1960s, first appeared in New York, is the name of the rock band at that time, and then spread to other areas, eventually formed the punk movement and punk culture. A serious economic crisis and pessimistic social conditions have created punk culture. Its central idea is rebellion and anti-tradition, which is expressed in decadent ways and extreme words and deeds [1].

Cyberpunk, also known as digital punk or computer punk, originated in the United States in the 1980s and first appeared in the title of a science fiction novel written by Bruce Baskes. The author uses the word in his novel in two ways: "the relationship between biology and machinery," and "the control of society by technology."

The true genesis of cyberpunk culture took shape during the 1980s, concurrent with the emergence of the science fiction literary movement. This era saw cyberpunk culture ascend to a position of prominence within the mainstream cultural landscape. Characterized by the catchphrase "high tech, low life," this cultural movement found its essence encapsulated therein. Within the realm of this culture, narratives often unfold against a dystopian backdrop wherein social fissures and disruptions to the established order hold sway. These narratives vividly portray the tension existing between the

privileged elite and the marginalized underclass, frequently entwined with artificial intelligence or ventures into uncharted technological territories, even extending to the far reaches of outer space [2].

Many works of cyberpunk have an anti-order dystopian spirit, and what the author wants to express is that as technology continues to advance, it will bring us not only benefits, but also a series of possible negative effects. People are thrilled about the continuous progress of artificial intelligence, but also fear of the unknown. Literature is the birthplace of cyberpunk culture, however, with the development of information technology, various cultural fields continue to collide, cyberpunk has a profound impact on games, animation, movies, clothing, etc. It has become a fashion culture, and has rapidly become popular among young groups [3].

2.3. Definition and Development of Punk Fashion and Cyberpunk Fashion

2.3.1. Development of Punk Fashion

The representative elements of punk fashion are zippers, rivets, biker jackets, metal chains, safety pins, torn fabrics, mesh fabrics and leather, etc. These elements together constitute the rebellious punk image, and the punk family manifests their dissatisfaction and resistance to the mainstream society through these sharp ornaments with strong visual impact and decadent negative ways. And among all the designers who introduced punk style into clothing, the most representative one is Vivienne Westwood, who has become the biggest beneficiary of this cultural revolution. She used rivets and other visual symbols to completely embody the punk spirit in clothing. She also introduced the punk spirit and its culture into popular fashion.

The 1970s punk fashion has a great influence on modern clothing style. The 1990s saw the rise of post-punk trends: grunge, underwear, see-through and other punk alienations. Today, in the 21st century, the concept of splicing, tearing, and mixing has become commonplace in the fashion world and has become a fashion design trend [4].

2.3.2. Definition and Development of Cyberpunk Fashion

Cyberpunk culture provides new ideas and directions for the field of fashion design. The main elements of cyberpunk fashion include three characteristics: a sense of technology, functionality and gloomy aesthetics. Advanced artificial intelligence, robots, high-tech weapons, and electronic facilities are major elements of cyberpunk fashion. Cyberpunk culture describes a future world with ever-changing science and technology, in which various social contradictions gradually emerge. Due to the continuous progress of network technology, the virtual network world has become an indispensable part of people's lives, where despair and hope coexist, the future world is full of chaos and order, and new high-tech electronic technology can be found everywhere. It expresses the unique characteristics of the technological era.

Tech-savvy virtual reality is at the heart of cyberpunk. The most prominent feature of cyberpunk clothing in modern life is the function of clothing. Its unique visual experience and the concept of expression has a great visual impact and expression. The performance of future science and technology implied in it is not blindly bright and hopeful, darkness and decadence are also the main content inside. The unique values that make the final embodied idea seem both lost and hopeful, not to give up hope even in the dark, constitute the soul of cyberpunk.

Central to the cyberpunk ethos is an inclination toward anti-establishment dystopian sentiments. Authors within this genre seek to convey a dual message: while technological advancement promises an array of advantages, it simultaneously harbors a spectrum of potential adversities. The prospect of burgeoning artificial intelligence garners excitement, yet remains shadowed by an aura of apprehension regarding the unknown. While literature initially served as the cradle of cyberpunk culture, the surge of information technology's progress has engendered dynamic collisions across

diverse cultural domains. As such, cyberpunk's influence reverberates profoundly through realms like gaming, animation, cinema, and fashion. Swiftly and compellingly, it has evolved into a cultural trend captivating the youth demographic.

3. Analysis

3.1. Cyberpunk Fashion in Film

Cyberpunk's first film appearance was in 1982's *Blade Runner*. The picture, the world it presented, and a strong visual effect successfully interpret cyberpunk. *Matrix* was described as "rich content combined with gorgeous scenes." Films such as *Ready Player One*, *The Fifth Element*, *Love, Death, Robots*, *Blade Runner 2049*, and *Ghost in the Shell* adapted from a comic book have all helped fuel the cyberpunk craze.

3.1.1. *Ghost Shell*, 1995

The film is adapted from the science fiction manga of the same name by Shiromasamu, which tells the story of 2029 in the "parallel world", where the whole world is connected by a huge information network, and all kinds of human tissues and organs can be artificial, and all kinds of new criminal incidents will also occur, and the Japanese National Public Safety Commission has set up a subordinate secret action team *Ghost in the Shell* to specifically solve such incidents [5].

There are lots of mecha elements in this film, such as the protagonist's costume, which makes the overall costume relaxed and has a very layered sense. The light-colored silicone combat suit worn by Soko Kusanagi when she captured the enemy headquarters building. Silicone can simulate the real texture of human skin, which is also related to the theme of cyberpunk, bionic man [6].

In terms of structural details, the mecha element is one of the elements commonly used by designers. In the film, the design of mecha is used in it, and the collocation of mecha corsets makes the overall clothing relaxed and has a very layered sense [7].

3.1.2. *Matrix*, 1999

The film tells the story of a young network hacker Neo found that the seemingly normal real world is actually controlled by a computer artificial intelligence system called "matrix", Neo met the leader of the hacker organization Morpheus under the guidance of a mysterious girl Trinity, and the three people went on a journey to fight against the matrix [8].

The main color of the Matrix is basically green and black, the fourth movie is replaced by blue and black, and in the collocation of clothes, formal clothes and gray and black trenchcoat are mainly used, giving people a justice and serious image. A common clothing in this film is a plain (mostly black) long trench coat or coat, simple and atmospheric. It's kind of like setting a scene.

The main character is usually dressed in black, and this kind of clothing emphasizes functionality and does not make too much noise in color. In the choice of clothing color, more colors with lower brightness are used, so that the overall character modeling is immersed in a gloomy atmosphere. The designer boldly integrates fashion-forward details into the seemingly retro style, fully highlighting the self-confidence and chic of modern urban women.

Even if the design is pure black, the style can hardly hide the feminine beauty. The use of natural materials such as pearls and silk on the vamp will also deduce the sexy black charm to the extreme. Sometimes there are many characters wearing costumes with Oriental elements [9].

3.1.3. *Blade Runner* 2049, 2017

The film is adapted based on Philip K. Dick's novel <*Do Bionic Men Dream of Electric Sheep?*>. The story is set 30 years after *Blade Runner*, which is a story of the symbiosis between humans and replicants in 2049, the contradiction between the two races escalated, and the new generation of Blade Runner K to find the former Blade Runner who has disappeared for many years, and joined forces to stop the fate of humans and replicants again [10].

In the surreal neon background, the male character's costume is mostly black as the main color, while the female character's costume is mostly black and gray, supplemented by white. For example, the leading character K often wears a cardigan suit. With simple, handsome, functional clothing style to set off the male character and identity characteristics: cold, cold and desperate; The costumes of the female characters also correspond to their personalities to a certain extent. The combination of some fabrics and styles with strong structure and sense of the future, and the embodiment of architectural beauty in some garments, is also a response to the background of the film. The dark tone represented by black is used incisively and vividly in this film, representing despair, lifeless and decadent. At the same time, it also implies that when science and technology progress to a certain extent, "black" is an inevitable result, reflecting the change of social politics and people's psychological state [11].

The *Blade Runner* series shows the design of the female body and perfect femininity under the male gaze. The appearance of all the female replicants is set to be women in their twenties or thirties, which reflects the social tendency to portray women. And the film emphasizes the heroine's concern for her own appearance, the need for her to "qualify" and be accepted as an ordinary woman by acting out stereotypical gender images. Her self-identity can only be considered credible by the other characters and the audience if she presents herself as perfectly feminine under social norms. Moreover, this requirement to display stereotypical femininity is a metaphor for the social experience of transgender people in proving their identity [12].

3.2. Discussion

In the design of character clothing, most of these films prefer solid colors, plain colors, or partial functional, military style clothing, which is related to the story of the film itself. In order to facilitate the actions of the characters, these clothes basically have several characteristics - slim, functional, multi-functional, in general, functional clothing. Another common clothing is a plain-colored long trench coat or coat, simple and atmospheric. In addition, the science fiction stories in cyberpunk movies are inseparable from space stations and laboratories, but when designing the characters in such scenes, the clothing styles will be changed, and the design of traditional Chinese clothing is often used.

Mechanical, armored elements are also very common in cyberpunk these films. In addition to prosthetics, the film will also use a "robot" -like suit to represent the "Cyberborg", which appears to have a "future sense" of clothing. In addition, in order to highlight the sense of science and technology of clothing, the selection of fabrics will be more special, such as the selection of PVC materials or other reflective and luminous materials. The fabric is smooth, waterproof and reflective, like a transparent raincoat, and was worn by the heroine of the original *Blade Runner*. One of the biggest differences between cyberpunk fashion and other fashion is that cyberpunk fashion is the product of the combination of future technology and retro sense, so there are many retro styles in the movies.

Matrix also prompted leather to become a very popular rebellious aesthetic clothing material. Then, a series of pieces, such as leather jackets, leather clothes, leather pants, gloves and so on appeared. The material of the clothing is also made of black laser TPU imitation leather fabric and transparent PVC fabric. PVC fabric and TPU fabric have the characteristics of rigidity, can shape the outline of

clothing, and has the characteristics of electronic metal materials; PVC transparent fabric creates a transparent virtual feeling. The use of dark gray fine imitation cloth for auxiliary decoration, further increase the beauty of the clothing.

From *Matrix* to *Ghost in the Shell* and *Blade Runner*, these three movies have almost completed all the imagination of the aesthetic concept of cyberpunk, making the concept of cyberpunk from a subculture to a mass culture.

Cyberpunk films visualize the future imaginations of human beings, and the formation of cyber-landscapes and metaphors is fascinating, and they closely revolve around the contradictions of techno-ethics and reflections on the subjectivity of human beings, who, whether they long for it or worry about it, are all entrusted with people's explorations and reflections on the world of the future. With the rise and prosperity of the "consumption of imagination", cyberpunk films have more and more significant advantages and potentials in the appreciation of art and culture, and the observation and vigilance on the fate of future human beings make themselves both aesthetic value and practical significance and make the scientific reverie of science fiction film creation full of humanistic spirit.

4. Designers of Cyberpunk Fashion

4.1. Kosan Ki

In recent years, the Japanese artist Kosan Ki has attracted much attention, and the image of metal machinery is everywhere in his works, which has become one of his representative works. The luster of metal always reminds people of bionic, avant-garde and futuristic. When the cold metal and the curve of the human body are combined, the bionic man will be displayed in people's sight with a cold, delicate and beautiful image. Kunsanji's art works and cyberpunk style works have similarities in both form and content, and in cyberpunk style clothing design, designers often use clothing shapes and fabrics with a strong sense of future technology [13].

4.2. Thierry Mugler

French designer Thierry Mugler is passionate about extremely futuristic design elements and is known for his bold designs and avant-garde style. He is very good at creating "Machina" clothing. This kind of clothing adopts the design of artificial limbs in the joints of the human body and closely fits the skin. Such design deconstructs the function of the clothing itself and gives the clothing new functions besides keeping out the cold.

At Mugler's spring/summer 1991 shows, pink and purple furs adorned models' silvery tight-fitting suits. In the same series, there are bright red leather fabrics, fluorescent pink fur suits, with models of different colors of hair, in addition to the advanced aesthetic, more is the designer's own vision for the 21st century, the future of society. This highly flamboyant, psychedelic and technological aesthetic form has become a typical symbol of cyberpunk style [14].

4.3. PUNK RAVE

PUNK RAVE takes "Revelation·Awakening" as the theme in the early fall of 2019, using artificial leather and fur as the main design fabric, making fur into a cape, surrounding them around the waist and neck, using leather and latex to restructure, wrapping and binding the body, and combing with embroidered fans, hair ornaments and hairpins. Various conflicts of accessories and materials are used to show the interaction between the original and the future, the east and the West in cyberspace.

4.4. Windowsen

Windowsen, a personal label founded by Chinese designer Senen Li, explores the cyberpunk style of fashion. His designs often use highly saturated colors and special unconventional sports materials to match the current popular cyberpunk theme with a full futuristic feel. His designs have an exaggerated shape, simulating the body of an animal based on the human body, full of wild and technological sense. In the shape of clothing, the deconstruction design methods such as binding, weaving and tearing are also used, so that the clothing has a unique asymmetric aesthetic feeling.

5. Cyberpunk's Future

In the design of clothing materials under cyberpunk aesthetics, combining the material material, color and decoration techniques to highlight the designer's visual creative concept can greatly improve the structural beauty of clothing, enhance the rationality and innovation of design, deepen the spiritual connotation of clothing under its aesthetic characteristics, and design clothing art works with a more contemporary sense and tension.

Whether the future world in the novel will become a reality remains to be seen, but what is clear is that the concept of cyberpunk, based on science fiction, has gradually become a cultural symbol, the aesthetic elements of which have had a profound impact on the field of fashion design today. This stylistic feature has drawn the attention of many first-tier international fashion brands, and I believe that in the near future, cyberpunk fashion with its strong visual tension and ideological core will be more widely seen by the public and play its greater value in the field of fashion design.

6. Conclusion

When Bruce Baske wrote the word Cyberpunk in 1983, he had no idea that the word would become an influential and popular science fiction art genre in the next few decades. The rapid development of science and technology suggests that the era of cyber is coming, its existence is not only as an aesthetic meaning so simple, but also a self-question, and each era is in its own way to give satisfactory answers, understanding its true connotation and the spirit expressed is a real designer and scholar to inherit and continue to write an aesthetic culture.

Analyzing cyberpunk fashion in the film involves subjective interpretation, as different researchers may have different views and interpretations in cyberpunk fashion. This subjectivity may affect the reliability and consistency of the findings. Meanwhile, the film is a product of its time, reflecting social attitudes and prejudices toward gender. These biases may influence how gender is portrayed in cyberpunk fashion, leading to stereotypes or limited representation.

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, future research should incorporate diverse perspectives, including those of gender and cultural studies experts, fashion historians, and film critics. This interdisciplinary approach can enrich research and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

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