

Study on Cyberpunk Style in Movies

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Abstract: Cyberpunk is a fusion of cybernetics and punk, also known as digital punk. It originates from science fiction and primarily explores the future development of humanity in relation to artificial intelligence. The purpose of this thesis is to study the influence of cyberpunk style on film-making's theme, graphics, and post-effects. The movie's theme mainly centers around anti-Utopian ideas, exploring the future fate of mankind and artificial intelligence with a pessimistic prediction. It explores the potential threat that artificial intelligence poses to the future society under the civilization of high mechanical development so as to criticize the contemporary society and cause self-reflection of human beings. Cinematography mainly utilizes colorful sci-fi elements such as skyscrapers and neon lights to create a futuristic world. In terms of color matching, dark scenes use low saturated dark colors to create a gloomy rainy day feeling while bright scenes employ reds, purples, and other highly saturated hues for a magical atmosphere that increases contrast between light and dark colors for visual impact. The post-film picture effects and background sound effects are very important for cyberpunk movies. Picture effects adjust the hue, saturation and lightness of the bright parts and enhance 3D buildings and cars to create a futuristic intoxicating atmosphere. Meanwhile, the music combines industrial, rock and other music styles to collide with special effects and sound effects, creating a virtual future space. Analyzing the western movie *The Matrix* and the Chinese movie *Heaven Sent* confirms our viewpoints and put forward expectations for human society. Ultimately, it comes to the conclusion that cyberpunk is not only a style, but also a way to convey new ideas.

Keywords: Cyberpunk style, anti-utopia, technology, futurism, post-processing.

1. Introduction

During the 1960s and 1970s, science fiction was loved, and a new wave of futuristic novels emerged. At first, the genre was called science fiction literature, and the term cyberpunk was originally derived from a short story "Cyberpunk" written by Bruce Bethke in 1983. Later on, as the mechanical, futuristic style continued to gain popularity, the cyberpunk genre was also well developed in the cinema. 1982 saw the release of the first cyberpunk-inspired film, *Blade Runner*, under the direction of director Ridley Scott, and the collection of futuristic urban and high-tech elements was well received by the public. At present, this style is mainly used in *The Matrix*, *Robotica* and other films closely related to hackers, artificial intelligence, and future technology, using a variety of distinctive colors in the film to achieve a strong visual impact, not only in the use of the classic elements of cyberpunk films but also in the plot and social issues related to the in-depth prediction and discussion.

This essay mainly adopts the literature research method, case study method, and inductive summary method to analyze and summarize the role and impact of cyberpunk on the use of the themes of cinematography, images, and post visual effects. With the continuous development of the Internet and information technology, this theme will have further expansion, not only has an important position in movies and literature but also having a profound influence in many fields such as music, fashion, games and so on. At the same time, this genre will inspire more human predictions about the future of society, as well as thinking about technological development and artificial intelligence.

2. The Use of Cyberpunk Style in Movies

2.1. Application in the Theme of Movie Shooting

In general, the themes of cyberpunk films mainly revolve around the criticism of society and human self-reflection under the anti-utopian ideology, the development of humans' future destiny and the dilemma of survival, as well as the convenience brought by the development of science and technology to human beings and the potential threat to human beings posed by artificial intelligence.

2.1.1. Utopian and anti-Utopian Themes

Most of the cyberpunk-themed films were inspired by the Utopian style to deliver anti-Utopian content. 19th-century Utopian literature was revived, and science fiction was born. 19th-century science fiction was a product of industrial civilization and science and technology, and during that period, European society was filled with a triumphant attitude towards science. The continuous development of science made people realize that science and technology seemed to have a way to change the earlier Utopian world from ideal to reality. As a result, science fiction was born when these optimistic expectations about the emergence of new science and the unlimited possibilities of future science became a creative trend and a taste [1]. In the late 20th century, anti-utopian literature began to emerge, which aimed to expose the negative impacts of science and technology. In the 1960s, Foucault put forward the concept of "anti-utopia," which is different from the rigid concept of utopia, but is a space with openness and inclusiveness and even includes the lowest and darkest space of society. Foucault compares heterotopia to a mirror: "I see myself here, but I am not here, and then I realize that in the virtual world I am there where I am not, and at this moment my visibility is overshadowed" [2]. Analyzing Utopian Literature and Anti-Utopia, one can understand that the former is an imagining of the future social space towards a positive trend in light of the current technological trends, while the latter has a pessimistic prediction depicting the real life situation of human beings in the future technological social space as nothing more than a shadowed corner. Anti-Utopia perfectly matches the pessimism at the heart of the cyberpunk genre, with themes such as hacking and artificial intelligence dominating the planet, and creates a similar atmosphere of future technology in its visuals. Utopia opens up the realm of sci-fi, while Anti-Utopia expresses the content of the cyberpunk style movie, combining a futuristic sci-fi space with human thoughts on social conflicts and human nature, thus bringing a more realistic experience of the future space to the audience.

2.1.2. Theme on Exploring the Future Destiny of Humankind

In addition, the cyberpunk style is also mostly used in movies depicting the theme of the future destiny of mankind. The core of cyberpunk wants to express the future technological level, but human beings cannot have a high quality standard of living; countries die out, urbanization increases, the gap between the rich and the poor becomes bigger, and the integrity of the social system is destroyed, so that the extremely high level of science and technology and the low standard of living form a strong

sense of contrast. In the prediction of future space, Prof. Xiong Yiran believes that the development of cyberspace is closely related to the media characteristics of the meta-universe and points out that in order to decipher the crisis brought by this correlation, it is necessary to rethink the cyber city and its subjectivity first. Prof. Sanfeng believes that sci-fi city creation essentially revolves around the three forces that shape the city, i.e., environment, technology, and human needs, thus exploring urban visions, imagining the future of mankind, and reveling in the direction of realistic urban development [3]. Cyberpunk style in the environment combined with neon lights and skyscrapers of this futuristic architecture, mapping out the rich here to enjoy the supreme life while the poor in the dark corners of the begging for a living, hooligans everywhere in this kind of no order and law of a kind of extreme world, a strong contrast to make people nowadays combined with the trend of development of science and technology to think about the crisis that will be faced by mankind in the future.

2.1.3. Reflecting on the Theme of AI-human Relations

At the same time, the cyberpunk style is also used to explore the relationship between artificial intelligence and human beings. With the rapid development of artificial intelligence, more and more people will lose their jobs and become "useless class" in the future. Correspondingly, AI will penetrate into all aspects of human social life, which will inevitably involve the issue of value judgment. If AI develops its own values, forms its own value judgments and becomes self-aware, human beings will not be able to predict its value judgments. If the AI is going to rebel against human beings, and human beings have neither the superintelligence of AI nor the ability to feel what AI thinks and feels, nor the immortal silicon matrix of AI, it will be a fatal blow to human beings, and human beings will never be able to turn the tide. Or, even if the AI can't get self-consciousness, but has a strong ability to destroy human beings, if it is manipulated by evil people with ulterior motives or someone's unintentional operational errors, it may lead to human beings being unable to escape the destiny of being enslaved, or replaced, or even destroyed [4]. In the world of cyberpunk, technology has infiltrated human life and even dominated humans. Although technology has brought great convenience to human beings to improve their standard of living and productivity, there is a risk that technology may be used by high-level people as a means of controlling the bottom level of humans to become enslaved or humans to be ruled by artificial intelligence. This fits with the theme of conflict between technology and human nature that Cyberpunk wants to express.

2.2. Utilization in Movie Screen Design

Cyberpunk style usually uses special color schemes, magical graphic elements, and light and shadow to present a dark style, futuristic city and high-tech feeling. In color matching, this style usually uses low saturated dark black and dark gray to create a dark, rainy night feeling. Meanwhile, highly saturated greens, reds, and purples are used in the bright colors to emphasize the magical feeling and add visual impact.

2.2.1. Case 1: *Wanderlust*

In the use of color, the sci-fi film *Wandering Earth 2* cleverly adopts cool tones to create the atmosphere of the universe scenes. The deep blue, mysterious black, and twinkling starlight together create a universe full of science fiction colors. This color combination not only makes the images look deep and mysterious but also creates a sci-fi and real atmosphere. When the audience enjoys these images, it seems that they can feel the coldness and loneliness of the universe, which further enhances the sense of immersion in the film. When showing the scenes of the Earth's home, the film's frame size and the use of colors have changed significantly. By adjusting the scale and color saturation, the film shows the beauty and fragility of the Earth to the fullest. The earth in these images is either

a lush green forest, a blue sea, or a bustling cityscape. These images convey a sense of vitality and hope through warm tones and bright colors. In contrast to the cold colors of the cosmic scenes, the images of the Earth's homeland highlight its preciousness and importance. When the audience enjoys these images, they can not only feel the beauty of the Earth, but also realize the importance of protecting it. In the scenes showing the characters' emotions and inner worlds, the film also shows its excellent painting and coloring skills [5].

2.2.2. Case 2: *Blade Runner 2049*

Blade Runner 2049 has a strong cyberpunk feel to it, with the movie's predominantly gray and blue tone showing the coldness of a technological city with a futuristic fantasy feel to it. In the film, the orange and yellow tones of the radioactive wasteland, the golden color of the co-color base, as well as the city shrouded in gray and blue, show the color side reaction of the city's class. At the same time, a large number of images in the movie are shot with back lighting, creating a dream-core feeling of the future world. Neon lights and fluorescent screens are the main elements of the cyberpunk style, creating a bizarre effect. The use of light and shadow strengthens the visual expression of the picture, combining the dark tones of greenish black in the dark parts and the low-saturated blue-gray in the light parts to create a depressing, dull, and indifferent future sci-fi city style.

Cyberpunk movies mainly use highly saturated neon lights and mechanical parts as the main elements, and the characters usually use exaggerated shapes; for example, they like to use glossy materials on the fabric of their clothes and then match them with various kinds of weapons. Taking *Wandering Earth 2* as an example, the classic clip in the movie is the drone swarm bee battle, with hundreds of thousands of drones in the sky engaging in a melee, forcing human beings to the end of their rope and the scene is spectacular and grandiose, giving people a very strong visual impact and experience [6]. This movie uses a lot of classic elements of cyberpunk: high-tech robots, showing the fantasy of the future city. With the rapid development of artificial intelligence, the battle between robots and humans may also be a possibility of the future city, in line with the depressing and cold feeling that cyberpunk wants to convey to the audience.

2.3. The Influence of Cyberpunk Style on Movie Post-Processing

The post-production art of cyberpunk style mainly includes special effects, visual effects, sound effects, and music.

2.3.1. Impact on Special Effects and Visual Effects

In the post-production of the movie screen, color mixing technology is very important. Rich colors and light and shadow effects can attract the audience's attention, mobilize emotions, produce a strong visual impact, and also set the overall emotional tone of the movie and accentuate the emotional atmosphere. In the cyberpunk style film, the low brightness is used to reflect the cold interpersonal relationship and the city full of haze; the high contrast shows the social class relationship, the slums and the upper class; the overall picture is dominated by the cold tones of cyan and blue; and at the same time, in the local area, by adjusting the color of the HSL to change the color to embellish the warm colors and highly saturated colored neon lights, which maps out a kind of blurring of the dream world and the reality. Post-coloring technology, as a picture color expression technology, plays an important role in film production. It can not only make the overall picture of the film more harmonious and unified but also assist in the character portrayal, atmosphere, theme expression, etc [7]. In the editing of post-production special effects for sci-fi movies, the cyberpunk style mainly includes the addition of neon-colored effects to enhance the nighttime city atmosphere, depicting a sense of paper

and gold; 3D models of high-rise buildings and automobile,, as well as cityscape, high-tech type backgrounds, and so on.

2.3.2. Impact on Background Music and Sound Effects

In the processing of background music and sound effects in the late stage, as most of the science fiction movies are synthesized by the film and television post, creating a large number of visual wonders to satisfy the audience's curiosity about the unknown, most of the scenes in the science fiction movie cannot be found in reality, and the sound and image also need to be fictionalized with post-synthesis [8]. Therefore, most of the movies in this genre combine a variety of music genres, mainly utilizing electronic music, industrial music, and rock music, which have a high degree of electronic style. This style was initially used in video games and sci-fi movies to portray the fear and confusion of the future world through repetitive melodies and jamming rhythms. This psychedelic electronic music style shows the pessimism that although the future world is a glamorous, high-tech world, the people at the bottom have a more miserable fate. The low-fidelity sound quality also pulls the audience's memory back to the early days, evoking an element of nostalgia and fascination. Cyberpunk style music builds an anti-utopian fantasy space of another future world through unique artistic expression and the combination of various music and art genres, which also brings an immersive experience to the audience.

Lv Ridge, in his article "Cinematic Soundscape: Flowing Urban Culture: A New Batch of Shanghai Films as the Center," points out that "science fiction films are characterized by jumping, splicing, and fantasies, and therefore the grasp of the soundscape must be more imaginative and coherent." Lv Meng thinks that the sound field can depict the outline of space, while the soundscape is a generalization of the framework system. Lü Ridge further analyzes the relationship between sound fields and space. First of all, she believes that sound field and soundscape construct the independence of sound space from the outside and thus become Michel. First, she argues that sound field and soundscape construct the independence of sound space from the outside, and thus become the preconditions for the concept of "sound source localization" proposed by Michel Chion. Secondly, Lü Ryochi, focusing on the internal structure of the independent sound field, argues that space and sound are artificially mixed and designed, and that this mixing is a combination of the virtual and the real. Lü Ryochi points out that the idea of sci-fi is getting closer to reality and that reality itself is constantly having a sense of "mixing." Finally, Lv Ridge suggests that sound and space are inherently coexisting, that the study of soundscape must start with the sound field, and that the mixing of sound and sound field also presents the mixing of sound and space [8].

To summarize, cyberpunk style is trying to create a virtual sense of future space through the technology of artificial hybrid music combined with the imagination of the future to create a sense of virtual reality, so that the audience indulges in the future space, and is more lyrical in thinking about the future of the city and life. Cyberpunk music is not only a style of music but also a reflection of the deeper social imagination, using unique sound quality combined with a form of artistic expression to show the creator's imagination for the future of the world and the negative impacts brought by technological advances. Currently, this style has an important position in the music industry, but in the future, it will not only focus on the music itself but also express the expectations of the deeper contained.

3. Analysis of Cyberpunk Style Movies

3.1. *The Matrix*

The movie *The Matrix* proposes an inverted world in which the virtual world is ordered and sterile, although the real world, as a representation of abandoned bodies, has an appearance of poverty and

chaos. Due to its existing binary structure, The Matrix Cyberspace is a simulated virtual reality, a fictional space in which the main condition and priority of the virtual universe created by machines is to prevent the people who make up the system from thinking [9]. The worldview of the film is set very much in the anti-Utopian social context of cyberpunk, exploring the relationship between AI and humans as well as the pessimistic predictions of a possible man-machine war in the world of the future. In the visual style design of the movie, based on the cyberpunk style, black and dark green are used as the main visual elements to create a cool cyber vision.

3.2. *Skyfall*

Not only in the West are there movies with strong cyberstyles such as *Blade Runner*, *The Matrix*, and *Top Gun*, but now China has also started to use this style in its movies. The animated movie *Skyfall*, produced by China Film Corporation and Beijing Agamang Film & Culture Media Co. The film tells the story of a group of highly advanced mechanical beings called "Ripcordians" who have taken over the Earth, and the "Chosen One," Kong, his partner Pujuan, and the human girl Nuwa, who are entrusted with the important task of saving the world by chance. The film is a fantastic adventure in which the ancient civilization of the East collides with the technological civilization of the future. The movie has attracted a lot of attention in the industry because of its unique style [10]. The film combines elements of classical Eastern culture, Western cyberpunk style, and the mythology of artificial intelligence to create a unique visual style. In the selection of the theme, a multicultural universe is constructed, incorporating postmodern attention. In the design of the visual style, the mythical character of the Monkey King from Journey to the West was combined with the glasses and simulation training platforms from The Matrix to create a unique visual style that combines the classical beauty of the Orient with the cool, futuristic technology of cyberpunk.

4. Conclusion

Cyberpunk style historically originated in science fiction and was later applied to the shooting of western movies. Through the combination of color, music, theme, picture, and post-production of the film, it depicts a high-tech and dangerous future world, creating a sense of realism for the audience, as if the future of mankind is as predicted by the movie, awakening people's sense of crisis and breaking the comfort zone of the single-minded development of science and technology.

Currently, cyberpunk-themed movies are gaining widespread support worldwide, and there is a strong interest in exploring the future. The western films *The Matrix* and *Blade Runner 2049* are both ideologically anti-Utopian, matching the two cyberpunk themes of the relationship between human beings and artificial intelligence and the exploration of the future destiny of mankind, respectively. In recent years, however, cyberpunk style is no longer synonymous with Western movies. *Wandering Earth 2* (2023) tells the story of how the Earth exploded due to over-exploitation by humans and how humans had to give up their homes to find a new habitat; the animation *Heavenly Descent* (2024) blends Eastern mythology with steamy cyber and wasteland styles and tells the story of saving the world. The collision of the two styles shows the unique characteristics of movies. Overall, from 1960 to the present, no matter whether in China or the West, this style has shown strong potential.

In a word, the cyberpunk style is not only an art form but also introduces new ideas. It will have a strong market in the future of film-making as it offers insights into the future world and provokes thoughts among viewers. This style is widely embraced not only in the western movie culture but also in the east, paving the way for more unique movie styles to emerge.

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