



Viewing the Contradiction from Cyberpunk Under the Operation of Capitalism Taking Neuromancer as an Example

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Abstract. Cyberpunk is a kind of subculture derived from the development process of capitalism, it contains the excessive development of capitalism and technology dependence intensifies social contradictions and ethical issues of extreme concern. To express such concerns, *Neuromancer* is a strong representative. Through an in-depth analysis of its plot, it is helpful to summarize the contradiction from cyberpunk under the operation of capitalism, to summarize the corresponding social warning significance.

Keywords: capitalism · cyberpunk · human-city contradiction

1 Introduction

Cyberpunk, a combination of cybernetic and punk -- has a strong sense of rebellion against the control of technology. The emergence of cyberpunk culture is closely related to the historical background of the real world. In the 1970s, Western scholars believed that the continuous use of the human labor force as the basis of traditional industry would lead to the curse that capitalism would never escape periodic collapse, and only by completely getting rid of the restriction of the human labor force and highly concentrating capital to promote the development of capitalist society could the cyclic turbulence and unrest be effectively avoided – that is, to bring capitalism to the ultimate stage of cybernetic capitalism. Such aggressive thinking has undoubtedly fostered a culture of fear and anxiety; On the other hand, the rise of neoliberal commodity fetishism also makes people start to worry about whether human beings will be completely commercialized and de-productive under the information and technological revolution, and how much impact such a situation will have on the future world and human living environment. [1, 2] With the widespread popularity of a large number of cyberpunk artworks, cyberpunk culture has set off a wave of heated discussions. The cyberpunk society is not just a simple science fantasy, and many of the cultural contents of postmodernism have reference significance to reality. [3] Take *Neuromancer*, the ancestor of cyberpunk literature, as an example. The story takes place in a world where extreme capitalism runs rampant, and most of the contradictions hidden in the plot are caused by extreme capitalism. In general, it is capitalism that gives Cyberpunk the core characteristics of its culture and its

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unique worldview, while cyberpunk culture further enriches the connotation of the root of capitalism in the virtual world, and boldly simulates and predicts the future development style of capitalism in an exaggerated but allegorical way, which complement each other. [4].

2 Literature Review

In the comprehensive discussion on the future development of cyberpunk society and capitalism, Cen, C. analyzes the relationship between the Cyberpunk world and the process theory of digital capitalism from the philosophical perspective of “antinomy”, provides useful speculation on the real dimension. Flandreau, M. and Legentilhomme, G. demonstrate the close connection between the cultural core of cyberpunk and the development of capitalism. Among the inductive analysis focusing on the human relations of cyberpunk, Zuo, S. and Chen, X. cite such ethical issues as the social class fixation, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, and the increasing dependence on technology in Cyberpunk, and these social ethics problems warn against the social development and technology research of our country today. Zhang, H.’s *Man’s Humanistic Ethics in the post-Human Form in the Cyberpunk films* demonstrates that in the face of emotional barriers and survival predicament, we need to break the disorderly development of capital hijacking technology and return to humanism to solve ethical problems. Rumpala, Y. explores the marginal and gloomy social environment of cyberpunk and considers the living conditions of human beings in a technocapitalist society, providing a logical reference for the generation of instability factors in sociological research. Han, L. analyzes the aesthetic quality and story background of cyberpunk’s cross-media and combines several cyberpunk artworks to elaborate on human hesitation under the control of high-end technology and monopoly enterprises.

The above research is mainly oriented to the concept of the macro level, and there is still room for further in-depth analysis of specific cases. Based on previous studies, this paper will take *Neuromancer* as an example to continue to explore the cyberpunk contradictory view under the operation of capitalism. Focusing on the carrier of culture and civilization, the culture contained in cyberpunk society is discussed in detail.

3 Man-City Contradictions in Cyberpunk Works

3.1 Contradiction Between People and Life Circumstances

The stories in Cyberpunk works mostly take place in a society in the same city where the future facilities carrying high-end technology and the slums symbolizing the poor living conditions of the bottom people coexist. In such a strong contrast, the living conditions of people and cities have produced many contradictions that are difficult to reconcile. Take Chiba City in *Neuromancer* as an example. It is the paradise in the eyes of “network cowboy” – a huge capital operation that supports a city signboard that is regarded as “synonymous with an implant system, nerve splicing and macrobiotic technology”. On the other hand, it is a lawless territory. The protagonist Case once firmly believed that the technology of Chiba City could cure his nerve wound. However, Chiba City was like

a money grinder, which consumed all his savings within two months, and finally left him with the answer of “nothing could be done”. After that, Case could only commit himself to live in the narrow “coffin hotel”, acting as a killer to earn a meager salary to make a living. While struggling with the oppression brought by the rusty reality, he was also addicted to holographic games and drugs from time to time and tried to narcotize himself through frantic sensory stimulation. These plots reveal the sharp contradiction between people and their living conditions under the control of extreme capitalism – that is, the people at the bottom do not deserve to own capital, and it is more difficult to retain capital. [5, 6].

3.2 Contradiction Between Person and Way of Being

The vast majority of Cyberpunk works hold a negative attitude towards the conjecture of the way of post-human existence, which is reflected in the “invasion” or “alienation” of technology from human’s original body, and even the formation of a deformed urban trend, revealing the contradiction between life’s maintaining its integrity and adapting to special needs. In the world built by *Neuromancer*, the combination of mechanical implants and flesh and blood has become a common phenomenon, which is vividly reflected in the protagonist Molly - she is a street warrior who often needs to deal with the fight that may happen at any time, so she has implanted dangerous nail blades and “nerve plug-ins” that can help the body react quickly; In the era of highly developed information technology, people don’t have to rely on their bodies to survive in the world. Case’s former master Pauli is a representative of the “mobile hard disk”, which is called the “thought box”, in which the body has disappeared but the mind consciousness continues to move; The soul of a human being is in jeopardy because no one can guarantee that the original self would not disappear after the body has undergone an excessive transformation. Armitage, the commander of the leading role team, is a complete victim. He has been replaced from head to foot as a string puppet of elite bureaucrats and intelligent AI before and after, and even his personality cannot be spared... These are contradictions between people and the way of existence, the root of the contradiction is that extreme capitalism extends to all aspects of society – they spread technology, but seize resources crazily. Everything is to meet the interests of the ruling class. In order not to get out of touch with the so-called “trend”, people can only accept the technology of destroying their own body silently: the street warrior Molly is poisoned by commodity fetishism, and cherishes the mechanical implants far more than cherishes her own original body; Case’s master Pauli was made into a “thought box” by the company. After being completely reduced to a commodity that can only provide advice to the holder without basic human rights, he began to yearn for real death. The elite bureaucrats modify his appearance to make him give false testimony at the hearing in an easily convincing manner to seek certain political benefits for the Pentagon. Intelligent AI Winter Silence implanted a dummy in him to make him easier to control, so as to complete the task of liberating himself. Armitage has always lived involuntarily, Finally, he was “abandoned” because of the loss of utilization value. [7–9].

3.3 Contradictions Between People and Others

The existence of large corporations in place of governments allowing urban crime to flourish is also a feature of the cyberpunk world. Without the jurisdiction and suppression of law, in a mercenary steel forest, the pattern of people getting along naturally becomes chaotic, resulting in contradictions and conflicts. For example, *Neuromancer* shows a dark interpersonal relationship: Case and Linda Lee had a one-night stand after just seeing each other, and under the influence of Case, young Linda Lee also became addicted to drugs with him, from a teenage girl crazy degenerate into a drug addict with only primitive desire; Linda Lee also cheated Case for money. She tried to sell his equipment secretly when Case was penniless. As a result, she was hacked and killed by street thugs who also wanted money. There are such things as “Night City is like a social Darwinian experiment in chaos and madness as bored experiment designers keep pushing the fast-forward button.” And “living night after night in the sinful ecosystem of the City of Night, carving out a precarious niche for yourself through lies and betrayal.” Such statements show the contradiction of faithlessness and injustice of the bottom people like trapped animals after the social order is destroyed and abandoned by the elite groups. These contradictions are also due to the “unequal treaties” made by extreme capitalism that benefit the elite and harm the people at the bottom. Every dirty corner of the city is filled with self-abandonment. In the inescapable bad culture, no one can escape from the mud. More will choose to abandon themselves, such an atmosphere is like an infectious disease, often spread rapidly in the interpersonal spread; The rich can always live in a high-end and comfortable environment, while the poor can only live in the garbage all their life. The people at the bottom are trapped in a vicious cycle. Everyone is objectified and everyone sees others as a commodity, genuine affection becomes a luxury, and instead, a stifling pace of life and deceit and betrayal become a means of survival. [10].

4 The Warning Meaning of Cyberpunk Works

The anti-utopian world of Cyberpunk style is a warning of the excessive development of capitalism, the extreme, and finally the plight of human survival. To avoid cyberpunk society coming to reality, it is necessary to maintain the progressiveness nature of the system – that is, to adapt the production relations to the productivity and the superstructure to the economic foundation; Adhere to the overwhelming majority of the people as masters of the country and respect the fundamental interests of workers; Never forget self-revolution, develop and innovate in sublation.

The constant weakening, replacement and elimination of human value by science and technology is also an important factor that causes the dark and decadent world of cyberpunk. We should attach importance to putting people first, fully affirm the irreplaceable value of human beings as labor subjects, and make science and technology used by human beings instead of eliminating human beings. At the same time, the right to human dignity should be protected, and people’s mental state under the pressure of survival should be taken care of.

Although cyberpunk works mostly depict the darkness of a society controlled by extreme capitalism, with a strong pessimistic color, it also has an undeniable theme – that is, it takes the rebellious spirit of “punk” as the core of its culture, alerting people to never abandon the rebellious spirit.

5 Conclusion

Cyberpunk culture is closely associated with capitalism. Exploring the specific contradictions presented in related cyberpunk works and summarizing their realistic warning significance is helpful to analyze the influence of capitalism on the cultural field in the historical process, as well as to discuss the root defects of capitalism. So that it can provide relevant references for society and promote the sound development of society.

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